

LINDA CARLTON'S
HOLLYWOOD
FLIGHT

EDITH LAVELL

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To
My Husband,
Victor Lamasure Lovell.



The two girls waited in breathless suspense.
(Page 133)
(Linda Carlton's *Hollywood Flight*)

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Linda Carlton Series

Thrilling Adventure Stories of a Group of
Girl Aviation Enthusiasts

By EDITH LAVELL

LINDA CARLTON, AIR PILOT

LINDA CARLTON'S OCEAN FLIGHT

LINDA CARLTON'S ISLAND ADVENTURE

LINDA CARLTON'S HOLLYWOOD FLIGHT

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LINDA CARLTON'S HOLLYWOOD FLIGHT

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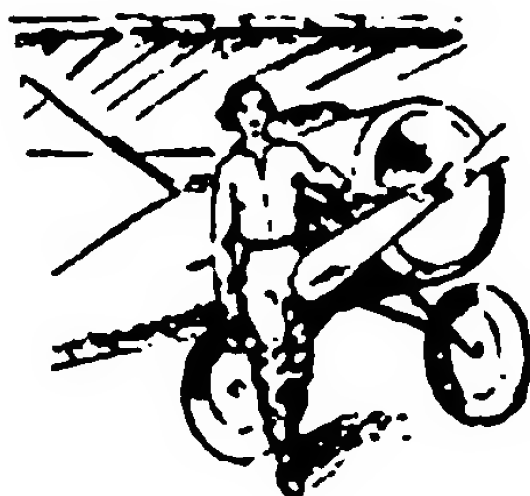
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LINDA CARLTON'S HOLLYWOOD FLIGHT

By EDITH LAVELL

AUTHOR of

"The Girl Scout Series," "Linda Carlton's Ocean Flight," "Linda Carlton, Air Pilot," "Linda Carlton's Island Adventure," Etc.



A. L. BURT COMPANY

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LINDA CARLTON'S HOLLYWOOD FLIGHT

CHAPTER I

A FLASH ON THE SCREEN

A BRIGHT red sports-roadster, loaded to overflowing with young people of both sexes, turned in at the gate of the Carltons' home in Spring City and whizzed up the driveway to the porch steps. As it stopped at the entrance, Dorothy Crowley, who was Linda Carlton's best friend, disentangled herself from the group and jumped out.

"Hello, Miss Carlton!" she called to the middle-aged woman sitting on the porch. "Any news of the world's most famous aviatrix?"

"You mean Linda?" returned Miss Carlton, smiling.

Dot nodded.

"Of course. Have you heard from her?"

"No, I haven't, Dorothy. But then, I didn't expect to. You know, of course, that Linda has set her heart on taking some sort of flying position, and she had several prospects to interview."

"But she's been gone a week!" protested Dot. "This is the twenty-second of September."

"I know, but she expected to be gone a week. She ought to be home some time today. If she doesn't come, I think she will let me know."

"Well, we miss her just fearfully," concluded Dot. "And we want to hear the very minute she gets back. You know Ralph leaves for college tomorrow, and he's all hot and bothered about going off without even a good-bye from Linda."

Miss Carlton smiled at the mention of Ralph Clavering's devotion to her niece. The young man, whose father happened to be the wealthiest citizen of Spring City, made no attempt to keep his admiration for Linda a secret.

"I'll have her call you the minute she arrives. At least—if she doesn't come home in an ambulance."

Dot laughed at the absurdity of such a sug-

gestion and turned to go. In her haste she almost bumped into a messenger-boy, who at that very moment was coming up the porch steps with a telegram.

Miss Carlton rose from her seat and stepped forward excitedly.

"Oh, I'm afraid something dreadful has happened!" she exclaimed, ominously.

Dot remained motionless, and even the young people in the car grew silent. An awful tenseness seemed to hang over the peaceful September day, as Miss Carlton received the message into her trembling hands.

"Why, it's *for* Linda—not *from* her!" she cried in sudden relief. "So she must be all right."

Scarcely were the words out of her mouth when the drone of a motor attracted everybody's attention to the skies. A plane—yes, with the rotors that proclaimed it an autogiro—was approaching from the west, until it seemed to hover over the very house itself.

"There she is!" screamed Dot, joyously, and in another moment the six young people in the roadster had all jumped out and were racing

towards the field beyond the house, where Linda always landed her plane.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Miss Carlton, grateful that once again the girl who had been through so many catastrophes in her zeal for flying would be safe on the ground.

Linking her arm with Dot's, she accompanied the young people to the field beyond the house.

With the ease of a cat settling down to take her nap, the Ladybug, Linda's famous autogiro, descended to the earth, and the slender, pretty girl in a flier's suit and helmet, climbed out of the cockpit.

"Darling!" cried Dot, dashing forward for the first embrace.

Linda tried to hug everybody at once, with an especially tender caress for her Aunt Emily, who had mothered her ever since she was a baby.

"Were you kidnapped?" inquired Ralph Clavering, the tall, good-looking young man who considered Linda his special property.

"Or in a burning house?" suggested Kit Hulbert, Ralph's married sister.

Linda shook her head laughingly.

"Just taking a good week's rest, I'll bet!"

surmised long-legged Jim Valier, whose idea of bliss was to sleep. "Don't blame you a bit, Linda. A fellow can't get a decent nap with this snappy bunch around, let alone a full night's rest!"

"You're surely all right, dear?" inquired Miss Emily Carlton, anxiously. "No bones broken?"

Again Linda smiled.

"I'm fine, and I had a most successful trip. I'll tell you all about it later—if anything materializes," she added, mysteriously.

"We want to go to the movies," explained Kit, as they all turned back towards the house. "Can you make it, Linda?"

"Yes, if you will give me fifteen minutes for a shower, and five for a bite to eat," she replied. "And if Aunt Emily will come along too," she added affectionately.

She made even better time than she had promised, and inside of a quarter of an hour, a different Linda Carlton came down the stairs. Clad in a blue silk suit the color of her eyes, her beautiful blond hair showing under her turban, she looked more like a society girl than the world's most famous aviatrix.

In the meanwhile, Dot had gone into the garage and brought out Linda's roadster, for Ralph Clavering's car, elastic as it seemed to be, could not be stretched to accommodate two extra passengers. Since Miss Carlton had graciously accepted their invitation, they wanted her to be comfortable.

"So you won't ride with me!" complained Ralph, as he watched Linda take her place at the wheel of her own car.

"I'll sit beside you in the movies," she promised.

"And you even take Dot away from us!" protested Jim Valier, pretending to be angry.

"You'll be glad of my space!" returned Dot, as she squeezed into Linda's car, between her chum and Miss Carlton.

"We'll miss the wisc-cracks," remarked Ralph. "But I can't say that you occupy much room, Dot." He started his engine. "Hurry up, now, or we'll miss the news reel, and think how ignorant we'll be!"

The theatre was already darkened when the group entered ten minutes later, so they all walked quietly, in order to make as little disturbance as possible. Even Sara Wheeler, who

giggled on every occasion, managed to suppress any outburst with her handkerchief.

But their good behavior lasted only a moment. No sooner were they comfortably seated than the most extraordinary piece of news was flashed on the screen. As if the manager had been waiting for the dramatic moment to make his announcement.

“WORLD’S MOST FAMOUS AVIATRIX SIGNS CONTRACT WITH THE APEX FILM CORPORATION!” thundered the voice of the announcer.

“As if any other girl could be as famous as you, Linda!” whispered Dot resentfully. “I’d like to know who—”

The words died on her lips as the actual picture of the famous aviatrix was shown. Why—it looked like—it must be—Linda herself!

The girl, in a flier’s costume, smiled and turned aside to sign a contract.

“MISS LINDA CARLTON, THE FIRST GIRL TO FLY FROM NEW YORK TO PARIS ALONE, ACCEPTS PART IN ‘BRIDE OF THE AIR,’ A PICTURE NOW BEING FILMED IN HOLLYWOOD,” continued the calm voice of the announcer.

“So that’s where you’ve been!” exclaimed Dot, just a little bit hurt that Linda had kept this a secret from her. They had shared all their joys and secrets ever since their experiences in the Okefenokee Swamp together, and it did not seem possible that Linda would deliberately shut her out of such an important event. Besides, Linda had always refused to go into the movies. Why the sudden change?

“You cagey thing!” muttered Ralph, as amazed at the revelation as Dot, and even more hurt than the latter that he had been excluded from her confidence.

Linda made no attempt to answer; she sat rigid in her seat, staring at the screen with unseeing eyes. The girl whom the announcer had proclaimed to be Linda Carlton was tall and slender, and in her flier’s suit and helmet, had resembled Linda to a remarkable degree. But of course it wasn’t Linda. Why, she hadn’t been near Hollywood!

“It’s not true,” she finally whispered to Dot. “That’s somebody else, posing for me.”

“Now, Linda!” returned Dot, unconvinced. “Don’t try to play innocent!”

“You’ll make a stunning heroine, Linda,”

whispered Kit, leaning over from her seat beside Ralph. There was sincere admiration in her tone.

Then the whole party grew excited, and all talked at once, shooting questions at Linda without any regard to the fact that they were supposed to keep quiet. People around them showed perceptible signs of annoyance, until Ralph, sitting back in sullen silence, admonished them all to keep still.

The talk subsided, and the crowd's attention was diverted during the feature, but Linda did not even see it. Inside she was seething at the very idea of anything so preposterous. Usually a peaceful girl, she felt as if she would like to tear that impostor to pieces.

Yet there was no use trying to tell the young people after the show that it wasn't true. Hadn't Linda been away for a number of days, on some mysterious errand connected with flying? Didn't the girl look like her—why, they were sure it was Linda! And they were thrilled, too. It was great fun to have one of their own group a famous actress, as well as a famous aviatrix. All of them—except Dot and Ralph.

"I want you to stay at our house for supper,

Dot," urged Linda, as the other car drove off after the show. "Can you phone?"

"Yes, of course," agreed her chum, wondering what kind of explanation Linda was going to make for her secrecy in the affair.

Neither girl mentioned it until they were inside the Carltons' house. They did not stop on the porch, but followed Linda's Aunt Emily into the living-room.

"I suppose your telegram was from Hollywood, Linda?" inquired Miss Carlton, as if to lead up to the all-exciting topic.

"No, it wasn't, Aunt Emily," replied Linda, decidedly. "It was from Mr. Eckert—you remember, the head of the Air School at St. Louis, where I took my course? . . . He wanted me to take a position teaching there this year."

"Why, that sounds very attractive, dear," replied Miss Carlton. "Safer and more dignified than all this stunt flying you'll have to do for the pictures." A look of distress passed over her face . . . "Linda, I don't like your accepting that contract without consulting either me or your father," she added, gently.

Linda dropped into a chair with a groan.

“Please sit down, Aunt Emily—and Dot. I have a lot to say.”

Not knowing what was coming next, they both complied with her request.

“Haven’t you both always found me pretty truthful?” she asked, seriously.

“Of course we have, dear,” answered the older woman, immediately. “Nobody ever doubts your word. But you never promised me that you wouldn’t go into the films. I never asked you not to, for I thought you wouldn’t consider it.”

“No, Aunt Emily, I wouldn’t. And I *haven’t*! You and Dot must believe me. *That girl you saw today impersonating me is a fake.* I never signed a contract, with any picture producer, and I haven’t been near Hollywood!”

Dot jumped to her feet joyfully, and, dashing across the room, wound her arms about her chum.

“I’m so glad, Linda!” she cried.

Miss Carlton breathed a long sigh of relief.

“But think of the impudence of that girl!” she exclaimed. “To dare to do a thing like that—”

“Expecting that she can get away with it!” added Dot.

“Well, she can’t!” announced Linda, her eyes shining with indignation. “I’m going to fly right out there and grab her by the collar—and—and—”

“Why, Linda, I never heard you talk so!” remarked her aunt in amazement. “Not even when you were a child.”

“I never had such occasion to do so before. You know what Shakespeare says about stealing your good name. That’s just what that girl’s doing. Making me cheap. As if I were in aviation for publicity, or for personal gain! Oh, I’m stirred up, all right!”

“I don’t blame you one bit, dear!” agreed Miss Carlton, soothingly.

“But what are you going to do?” demanded Dot, realizing that Linda must have already formulated a plan during that moving-picture show. “Going to wire the Corporation?”

“Indeed I’m not!” she replied, emphatically. “They wouldn’t believe me.”

“‘How could they believe you?’” quoted Dot, from the old song of “The Girl from Utah.”

“Exactly! If all my own friends—Ralph, and Kit and Jim and everybody—yes—even you and Aunt Emily—actually thought I was fooling, how could I convince a strange director by merely sending a telegram? He’d think I was the impostor, of course, and their Linda was the real thing.”

“Yes, that’s logical,” admitted Miss Carlton. “But what can you do, dear?”

“I’m going to fly right out to Hollywood tomorrow, after I give the Ladybug a thorough inspection.”

Miss Carlton sighed, this time not in relief.

“Then you’ll be home only one night!”

“I can’t help that, Aunt Emily. I must go. I just have to. I’ll stop and see Mr. Eckert at St. Louis, on my way.”

Dot’s eyes lighted up with sudden inspiration.

“May I go with you, Linda?” she asked.

“May you!” Linda repeated. “Oh, Dot, would you? I’d just love it!”

“And I’d feel safer,” put in her Aunt Emily.

“It’s decided, then,” announced Dot. “I’m thrilled to death! . . . Oh, Linda, think of seeing Hollywood. The movies being made—and

the stars themselves! We'll have a marvellous time."

"Be sure to take plenty of clothes," cautioned Miss Carlton. "You know how much they dress out there."

"We'll outshine Lilyan Tashman herself!" promised Linda, thankful that her aunt was not raising any objection to the trip.

"Going to tell Ralph about it?" inquired Dot, as she rose to telephone to her mother.

"What's the use?" returned Linda. "He wouldn't believe me. He'd think I was going back to complete my contract. No; he's peeved—let him stay peeved. I'd rather spend my evening planning our trip."

"Flying comes first, as always," observed Miss Carlton, in a resigned tone, as she, too, left the room, to do her part in making the trip comfortable for the two girls.

CHAPTER II

A DANGEROUS LANDING

EARLY after lunch the following afternoon—another clear, bright fall day typical of late September—Linda Carlton and her chum Dorothy Crowley climbed into the Ladybug, ready to take off for Los Angeles. Smiling and waving good-bye to Miss Carlton and Mrs. Crowley, who were standing on the side of the field, Linda gave her the gun. The plane taxied only a short distance, then with her nose headed upward, she began to climb almost vertically. It was a pretty, graceful take-off, and even Miss Carlton, frightened as she was of planes, had to admit that the autogiro seemed almost human.

“We ought to make St. Louis before dark,” said Linda, through the speaking-tube. “I know the way so well—I flew it so often when I was going to the Air School.”

“I remember,” replied Dot. “You and Louise.”

Louise Haydock had been Linda's inseparable chum all through high school. Then, when they had graduated, and Linda's father had given the latter an Arrow Sport plane, the two girls had spent a year at a ground school in St. Louis. Louise's marriage to Ted Mackay had finally separated them, for the Mackays went to Kansas City to live. Ever since that time Dot Crowley had shared in most of Linda's flying adventures.

"I'll tell you what," suggested Linda. "Let's send Lou a wire tonight, and plan to stop in Kansas City tomorrow for lunch. I'm wild to see her."

"Great!" agreed Dot. "If she and Ted aren't off on some flying trip."

The autogiro soared up into the clear, tingling air, colder above than it had been on the ground, and the old exhilaration of flying took possession of Linda and made her heart sing. Poor people down there on the earth, looking like ants crawling about on their humdrum affairs, when she was flying joyously through the heavens! Poor Aunt Emily, who would never know the thrill of this higher, freer, purer world!

Even her anger against this impostor was temporarily forgotten. Nobody could be angry long in the sky. And, no matter what happened later, she and Dot were going to enjoy this trip to the coast. It would be the experience of a lifetime to an ordinary girl.

The motor continued to hum evenly and the Ladybug averaged a hundred miles an hour. Over rivers and valleys and flat country, through Ohio, past Indiana, on to Illinois. The sun was setting as the girls sighted the broad waters of the Mississippi, and they knew that their first goal was in sight.

A huge beacon light was already glowing, guiding the fliers on their way to the airport, and then on to the Air School. But Linda could have found her way without any guide, even in the fast increasing darkness.

Linda decreased her speed and hovered over the field. Some of the attendants recognized the famous Ladybug, and by the time the autogiro descended to earth, quite a crowd had gathered to greet her.

“Hello, Miss Carlton! We knew it was you!”

“Glad to see you back, Miss Carlton!”

Linda and Dot jumped out and Linda spoke

to all her friends and asked them to put the Ladybug away for the night, and to tell her where to find Mr. Eckert.

“He’s gone home, but you can get him on the telephone,” answered one of the attendants, writing the number down for her.

“We saw you in the movies, Miss Carlton!” announced another. “You didn’t look half pretty enough, though. But we’re sure goin’ a see that picture when it comes to town!”

Linda frowned. She didn’t want to take the time to deny the false impression, but she certainly did hate this sort of thing.

The girls found a taxi at once, and, leaving their bigger box in the autogiro, they took out an overnight bag and went to a hotel that had been familiar to Linda during her year at St. Louis.

“That’s what I’m going to be up against all the time!” she remarked, with distaste, as she and Dot settled back in the taxi.

“You mean about the movies?” questioned her companion. “I was wondering why you didn’t deny it right off.”

“I haven’t time to go about the world denying things. And it seems so useless. Until I

have proof, I mean. They wouldn't believe me any more than the crowd at home did."

"I suppose you're right. Oh, well, don't let's worry. We can clear the whole thing up in no time."

They reached the hotel, made an appointment with Mr. Eckert over the telephone, and changed their costumes for dinner. It was after seven o'clock when they sat down to the table, and they did full justice to the meal.

Mr. Eckert's first remark when he greeted Linda was practically the same as that of the boys on the field.

"I hear you are going into the movies, Linda," he said, trying to hide his disapproval. "If I had known that, I shouldn't have wasted your time offering you this position at the school."

Linda sighed.

"That's a false rumor, Mr. Eckert," she explained.

"But it wasn't a rumor. It was a fact," he persisted. "Sam and Jeff told me they saw your picture, signing the contract."

"I know. I saw it too. But it's a fake. Some

girl is impersonating me. For the sake of the money, I suppose."

The elderly man leaned forward, staring incredulously.

"Do you really mean that, Linda?" he demanded.

She nodded.

"I'm on my way to the coast now, to clear it all up. Naturally, I'm furious."

"You won't take over the contract yourself?" the man asked, with apparent satisfaction. What a joy this girl was, he thought! She was made for far greater things than moving-picture acting. Hers was a name that ought to go down in history, among the daring pioneers of aviation.

"Of course not," she assured him. "You know, Mr. Eckert, that that sort of thing doesn't appeal to me—publicity and acting—and all that stuff. I'm happiest when I'm up in the skies with nobody else but my chum—Miss Crowley."

"That is what I always thought," he said. "So I must say I was somewhat disappointed in the news when I heard it."

Linda smiled. Mr. Eckert had always under-

stood her, and admired her—not as Ralph Clavering admired her, for her beauty and feminine charm,—but for her knowledge and skill as a flier.

“Then you might consider my proposition after all?” he inquired, hopefully.

“Yes, indeed. If you are willing to make it more or less temporary. I mean I could sign up for the duration of one course—say until next spring. The other offers I have had have all been so far away, that I’d rather accept yours, so that I could fly home every week-end. My aunt is practically alone, you see, for my father’s business is in New York.”

“That’s splendid, Linda!” he cried, and he proceeded to go into detail about the work that he wanted her to teach. Dot sat back in her chair, gazing out of the window, and vainly trying to suppress a yawn.

“I’m afraid, Mr. Eckert,” remarked Linda, when the former had finished his explanation, “that I may not be back in time to start when the school opens. Would you be willing to wait for me—till, say, the first of October? I ought to be here by then, though you never can tell.”

At these words Dot sat up and laughed.

“You surely can’t!” she agreed, heartily. “We have a habit of not showing up when we’re expected, Mr. Eckert—when Linda goes on her wild adventures.”

“Oh, but this is different,” put in Linda, sincerely believing that there were no wild adventures in store for her this time. “Hollywood isn’t like the Okefenokee Swamp. It’s the most civilized spot in the world.”

“But we haven’t promised to stay in Hollywood,” Dot reminded her.

“True,” admitted Linda.

Mr. Eckert rose.

“I’ll tell you what I’ll do, Linda,” he said. “I’ll teach the class myself until the first of October. Then, if you can’t come, I’ll get another instructor. Is that all right with you?”

“Fine,” agreed the girl, delighted to have it all settled, and at a salary that was by no means small. For Linda Carlton was a drawing-card, and Mr. Eckert knew that her name would bring new students to the school, and add prestige to the fine faculty which they already had.

The last several days had been glorious weather—too good to last, Linda knew—for about the middle of September the fall rains

usually set in. So she was not surprised to waken the following morning to find a dismal downpour, and what was worse, a bad wind. It was one of the equinoctial storms, so common at that time of the year.

Dot looked dismayed, but she had no idea that Linda would postpone the flight. For you couldn't tell how long such a rain might last, and time was important.

She watched Linda get into her flying-suit, as if the mere matter of weather were nothing—all just part of the day's work.

“Hurry up, Dot. If we are to make Kansas City by lunch time.”

“O.K.,” agreed the smaller girl, cheerfully. They were back at the field by half-past seven, ready to start.

But the field was horribly muddy. Other planes had encountered severe difficulty in taking off, and the attendants looked doubtful.

“Looks as if you're not going after all,” remarked Sam, stepping close to the Ladybug, as Linda started the rotor blades in motion.

“It's a beastly day.”

Linda smiled.

“My rotor blades are going to help me to rise,” she returned, gaily. “Just watch ‘em!”

Two minutes later the autogiro left the rain-covered field, and soared into the murky skies. Almost immediately the ground and the landmarks became invisible to the girls in the cockpits, and the plane seemed to be wrapped in a great gray blanket of clouds and rain. The wind was blowing furiously, as if it were determined to get the better of the gallant Ladybug, but the rotor blades of the autogiro succeeded in keeping her on an even keel. But she rocked furiously, until Dot felt sure that she was going to be seasick.

Linda's gas was growing a little low—plenty, she felt sure, to get to Kansas City—but not any to waste, so she was keeping low. But she could not see anything, and she was thinking that at times like these flying could even be monotonous, when, all of a sudden, as if in a hideous dream, she saw a nineteen-story building rushing madly at her. Not that she realized that it was exactly nineteen stories—indeed it looked taller than that at the moment. It was huge, too big to avoid, as it loomed there in her path, like some tremendous, hor-

rible monster, shutting out everything else in her sight, waiting to annihilate her.

In the seat ahead Dot suddenly let out a sharp cry of terror, and Linda, realizing in a flash that she could not hope to clear the building now, pushed the joy-stick forward and nosed the plane into a dive. What was she heading for? A street, where she would dash down on top of pedestrians and motor-cars, killing others as well as herself and Dot? . . . But no, the speed was reducing; she was right over another office building—a shorter one, only about six stories in height—with—oh, joy of joys—a flat roof! As if she had planned it, she selected her spot, banked the autogiro to the left, cleared the wire fence around the edge, and landed right in the center of the roof! Making it look all the world as if she had planned a demonstration.

With a grin of incredulity she turned exultantly to Dot.

“Linda, you’re priceless!” shouted her chum. “Anybody’d think it was a stunt for the movies.”

Linda frowned, and Dot was sorry the instant the words were out of her mouth. She had

forgotten all about the reason for the flight, in her excitement at this narrow escape.

At this moment half a dozen people appeared on the fire-escape, and a freckle-faced youth of about eighteen climbed immediately to the roof.

"Pretty neat!" he exclaimed. "Is it a stunt?"

"It was a life-saver," explained Dot. "We nearly crashed on top of that big office building over there, and this one just loomed up in time."

"Know what building this is?" asked the young man.

Linda shook her head.

"It's a newspaper building! Biggest newspaper in Kansas City!"

"I never heard of a building made of newspapers," returned Dot. "Funny we didn't crash through!"

The young man grinned; his specialty was wise-cracks. "I'm a reporter," he announced. "My slogan's 'First on the spot, to get news while it's hot.'—so please give me your names and addresses." He took out his notebook, prepared to write.

Linda looked displeased, but Dot was equal to the occasion.

“Sallie Slocum and May Manton, from Toonerville,” she replied, briskly. “Two society buds.”

The reporter solemnly wrote down the names.

“Toonerville—where—what state?” he asked.

“Toonerville, Trolley,” answered Dot, without blinking an eyelash.

This time the young man didn’t know whether to smile or not.

“You’re kidding me! That’s a name in Fontaine Fox’s cartoon.”

“Sure it is,” agreed Dot. “But it’s a place, just the same. Just write and ask Mr. Fox, if you want to know.”

Linda, meanwhile, had been examining her gas supply. It was sufficient to take them to the suburbs, where Ted and Louise lived, and she was anxious to be off.

“Come on, May,” she said to Dot, managing with a great effort to keep her face straight. “We’re off—if the young man will be kind enough to get out of the way.”

The reporter went back down the fire-escape, and Linda took off, but as the girls flew away.

they could distinguish faces peering at them from every window in sight. After all, they had afforded a pleasant diversion to a dull, work-a-day world, and Linda was thankful that it had all turned out so happily.

“And how clever of you to think of giving fictitious names, Dot,” she said, through the speaking-tube. “Now if it gets into the papers, Aunt Emily will never guess that it was my Ladybug. It might worry her dreadfully if she thought I was dropping out of the skies all the time on top of office buildings. She’s dreamt about my being pinned on a church steeple, dangling in mid-air.”

Fifteen minutes later, without further mishap, they landed at the Mackays’ field, and saw Louise waiting for them with an umbrella.

“Darlings!” she shouted, above the noise of the engine and the rotors, and dashed across the muddy field like the impulsive girl she had always been. “I’m just wild about this!”

Linda and Dot jumped out of the cockpits and hugged her joyfully.

“Now come on in and get warm and dry,” said Louise. “Pity we can’t take the Ladybug

inside too. But Ted'll look after her comfort when he gets home."

"Does Ted get home for lunch?" asked Linda. "Oh, I hope he does, for I haven't seen him in ages."

"No, darling, he doesn't. But he gets home for supper, and you two are going to stay all night."

"We can't, Lou—honestly—"

"There's no use arguing. You just have to. Didn't my Ted save your life a couple of times at least, Linda Carlton? Don't you owe him a debt of gratitude?"

Linda laughed; there was no use arguing with Louise. After all, there was no great hurry—and it was bad weather for flying. One night more or less wouldn't make much difference, she thought.

So the young people spent a pleasant afternoon and evening together, talking aviation, swapping stories and gossip, and laughing heartily over the newspaper story about their strange landing, which appeared on the front page that night. Little did they think at the time that Dot's prank was to cause them serious trouble later!

CHAPTER III

THE CROSS-COUNTRY FLIGHT

“HOW do you go from here?” inquired Louise the next morning at breakfast, which had been arranged for seven o’clock so that the girls could make an early start. The skies were still dark, and it was raining, but the wind had died down, and with it the worst of the storm.

“From here to Wichita, and then on to Albuquerque by tonight, I hope,” replied Linda. “We’ll be following the regular air-line. I think that is really the safest and best way. By tomorrow night I expect to land at Los Angeles.”

“Do you have to cross Death Valley?” asked Louise.

“Fly over it—not cross it,” corrected Linda. “But that has no terrors for me. And we shall miss the worst of the Rockies, following such a southern course.”

“Take plenty of water and gas, in case you come down in the desert!”

“That reminds me, Ted,” said Linda, turning to the big, red-haired young man at the head of the table. “Did you fill my Ladybug up?”

“Yes, and gave her a hasty inspection, too,” he replied. “She looks O.K. to me.”

“Then I’m not expecting any trouble,” returned Linda, for she had great confidence in Ted Mackay’s judgment and knowledge of airplanes.

While Linda took time to call Miss Carlton on the long distance telephone, Louise insisted upon packing a lunch, and filling the thermos bottles with water and coffee. For she had never forgotten Linda’s first long flight when they had been stranded on a lonely prairie, far from food and civilization, and how grateful they had been then for the elaborate picnic lunch with which their hostess had supplied them.

“You’re a brick, Lou!” Linda cried, as she kissed her good-bye.

“Don’t forget to stop next week, on your way home!” Louise reminded her.

The Ladybug’s engine roared, and she taxied a short distance, soaring soon into the skies. To her joy Linda found that flying conditions had

considerably improved since the previous day. The storm was clearing, and up above the clouds, the sun was shining. Linda's way lay straight before her, and she flew on and on, keeping a sharp watch all the time for other planes, until the clouds beneath her had completely dispersed. Passing over Kansas, she left Wichita behind long before noon time, and pressed on through the northern part of Oklahoma—into Texas, the state in which her father's ranch had been located, when she took that daring night-flight for the surgeon who saved his life. At last, by consulting her map, she felt certain she had reached New Mexico.

Both girls had been so thrilled in watching the country beneath them—so strangely different from the East—that they had not realized how late it was growing. Hunger finally drove Dot to consult her watch. To her surprise she found that it was after three o'clock.

"Let's eat!" she said to Linda, through the tube. "I'm starved!"

"Where?" shouted Linda, surveying dubiously the ground beneath them, covered with dry bushes. There wasn't a sign of civilization

or cultivation anywhere about, and she had no desire to land.

“Right here in the plane,” returned Dot. “You haven’t forgotten the lunch Lou packed for us?”

“Good idea! And we’ll get to Albuquerque all the sooner. Something tells me that we’re not far off—if my calculations are correct.”

“Well, we can’t be lost,” replied Dot. “For we’ve been following the beacon lights straight along the way. O. K., then. I’ll unpack. Thank goodness Lou fixed a lunch.”

The sandwiches and coffee were delicious, and all the while Linda kept right on flying. But it was still light when the spires and buildings of Albuquerque loomed up in the distance.

They landed at the airport and went to a hotel for the night, thankful that the day, though uneventful, had passed so pleasantly, and hopeful for clear weather to continue for the rest of their journey.

The sun was shining brightly and the day was already hot when the girls took off from Albuquerque the following morning. For hours they flew over this hot, dry plateau region, where

the water supply was scanty, and where they could see, even from their height in the air, the bare earth shining between the scattered clumps of grasses and shrubs.

“We have to miss the Grand Canyon,” Linda told Dot as they came down at a small airport town in Arizona, to rest and get their lunch. “It lies up in the north-western part of the state, you know, and if we follow the most direct course to Los Angeles, we miss it.”

“Maybe we can fly over it on our way back,” suggested her companion. “We’ll have more time to enjoy the scenery when we have settled with this impostor.”

“Yes, that’s just what I think. So long as we get home before the first of October, I’m a free woman.”

They continued their flight without any interruptions or disasters all that afternoon. They left Arizona behind and crossed into the great state of California, over the San Bernardino Mountains, where the climate was lovely. Orange groves blossomed everywhere, the air was sweet and delicious; they felt a great envy of the people who could always live in this beautiful region. At last they reached the city of

Los Angeles, and spotted the new white city hall, as it rose in its majestic splendor, gleaming in the brilliancy of its electric lights.

“Good old Ladybug!” exclaimed Dot, as the autogiro came to the ground at the airport, and she stiffly climbed out of the cockpit. “Never lets us down!”

“Always lets us down—when we want her to,” corrected Linda, laughingly.

“You’re going to leave her here at the airport while we go on to Hollywood?” asked Dot.

“Yes, I think so. I’ll have the mechanics give her a thorough inspection in the meanwhile. But I don’t want to go tonight. Let’s have a good dinner and get some sleep and start out fresh tomorrow morning. We’ll have our box taken with us this time, and dress for the occasion. We don’t want to look like hicks from a small town.”

While Linda turned to give her instructions to an attendant, a strange young man strolled up to the girls and stopped, evidently waiting for an opportunity to speak to them. It was growing dark, but the beacon searchlight at the airport was bright enough for them to see him perfectly. He looked at the autogiro, and then

peered almost rudely into the faces of the two girls. Linda ignored him, but Dot was furious.

“Pardon me, ladies,” he said finally, “but aren’t you the two girls who landed on the top of that newspaper building in Kansas City?—Miss Slocum and Miss Manton, I believe the names were?”

Dot giggled. She couldn’t deny the fact.

“So you’ve been taking a cross-country flight in this boat,” he continued. “I have a friend who is a reporter—he’s around here somewhere, for he stops here every day at the airport for news—and he’d like that story, if you’d give me a few facts.”

“We don’t want publicity,” Dot said, immediately. “So please don’t let him print anything at all about us.”

“Besides,” added Linda, “there’s nothing new in what we’ve done. Girls fly all over the country every day alone. It really doesn’t mean much more than driving a motor-car nowadays.”

“You’re right about that,” agreed the attendant. “It was a stunt to fly the Atlantic once, but now it seems rather common-place.

The first person to go from here to Australia by plane will sure get a head-line.”

“We don’t expect to try that!” returned Dot, laughingly. “That’s a little too far.”

“By the way,” remarked the stranger who had looked so keenly at the girls, “did you girls know that Linda Carlton is here at Los Angeles—or rather, at Hollywood? You remember her—the first girl to fly from New York to Paris alone? . . . She has a contract with the Apex Film Corporation.”

Linda and Dot looked at each other in distress. This was a fine situation indeed. What could they say?

“My name is Linda Carlton,” the aviatrix finally announced, quietly.

“Go on! Your name’s Sallie Slocum!” insisted the young man.

“As you please,” shrugged Linda, turning to the attendant. “Nevertheless, I want this autogiro registered here as belonging to Linda Carlton, of Spring City, Ohio.”

“O. K., Miss,” agreed the attendant, making note of the fact.

Summoning a taxi, the girls stepped into it and closed the door without even so much as

good-bye to the young man who had forced a conversation with them.

“What gets me,” observed Dot, “is the way reporters seem to bob up anywhere and everywhere—just when they’re not wanted.”

“True, but they have to get news, I suppose. And it was really my fault in the first place, for landing on a newspaper building. I would have to pick that out!”

“Oh, well, who cares?” returned Dot. “It’ll blow over, and be forgotten . . . What hotel are we going to?”

“The Ambassador. I’ve heard so much about their ‘Cocoanut Grove’ that I want to see it.”

A few minutes later the taxi stopped at the luxurious hotel, and the girls secured a room. They engaged it for only a couple of days, little thinking that they would have to remain in Los Angeles for a longer period of time.

It was lots of fun to dress in evening gowns and sweep into the dining-room as if they were actresses. Even Linda admitted that she enjoyed taking off her flier’s suit at times, and just being a “regular girl.”

“For tonight we’ll be absolutely care-free,”

she said. "As if we hadn't a thing to worry about!"

"Which we really haven't," added Dot.

They ordered an elaborate dinner and ate slowly, watching the people in the dining-room, hoping to catch a glimpse of a famous star or a celebrated flier. But if there were actors and actresses there, neither Linda nor Dot recognized them.

"I wish there were a 'first-night' performance that we could attend," remarked Dot, when, after dinner, they summoned a taxi to go to a moving-picture show.

"Yes, it would be nice. But then, we probably couldn't get in, anyhow. Unless I pretended to be the Linda Carlton who is in 'Bride of the Air'."

Dot laughed.

"That would be a mix-up. The other girl doubling for you—and then your pretending to be the other girl!"

"Sounds kind of like 'Alice in Wonderland' to me."

In spite of the fact, however, that nothing unusual happened, the girls spent a pleasant eve-

ning, and were glad of the chance to get to bed early.

“For,” remarked Linda, as she undressed in the charming bedroom, “I am tired, even though we didn’t break any records crossing the country.”

“It was fast enough for me,” agreed Dot. “I’d rather rest now and then, than dash off like Frank Hawks. And when you compare it to the way they used to cross the United States, it’s no less than miraculous.”

“I know,” yawned Linda. “What was it that that movie said—twenty-four days in 1850?”

“Yes, that was it, I think. Only I’m too sleepy to remember much now. . . . Wake me up early tomorrow, Linda. For it’s HOLLYWOOD!”

CHAPTER IV.

HOLLYWOOD

“IT certainly seems queer to be riding along the ground,” remarked Linda, as she and Dot stepped into a bus for Hollywood the following morning. “But we can see so much more.”

“And it’s only eleven miles,” Dot reminded her. “Oh, aren’t you thrilled, Linda?”

“Of course I am. What girl wouldn’t be?”

“If they offer you the contract now, won’t you change your mind and go into pictures?” inquired Dot.

“No,” replied the famous aviatrix, decidedly. “I love the movies, and of course I’m keen to see the stars face to face, but I still haven’t the slightest desire to act. I guess I’m too shy. I get so fussed.”

“But it’ll be kind of a mean trick to haul that girl out of the picture after the Film Corporation have advertised it, and then not take her place. The producer may lose a lot of money.”

"That's his fault. They should have been more careful about looking up her credentials."

"Suppose you can't convince them that you're the real Linda Carlton?" suggested Dot.

"I'll have to stay there till I do. But I have my licenses with me. I only wish I had my Distinguished Flying Cross, but unfortunately Daddy put it away in his safe-deposit box."

The bus was luxurious and the girls settled down in delighted comfort. All the other passengers looked prosperous and well dressed; from their appearance they might easily be moving-picture stars. But of course they weren't, the girls decided, for even the humblest star has her own car.

The country through which they were traveling was lovely, and as they approached Hollywood, the girls noticed charming, well-kept bungalows and homes of every description. As if everyone who lived there were wealthy. The fresh green lawns, the tall palm trees shading the streets, the vivid blue sky above formed a striking picture. No wonder most girls were wild to go to Hollywood!

Linda and Dot went on to Culver City, where most of the studios were located, and found the

'Apex Film Corporation, housed in a large and imposing building. As they ascended the steps Linda became exceedingly nervous, almost to the point of wishing that she hadn't come.

"Suppose they take us for extras—applying for jobs—and throw us out!" she whispered, fearfully.

"Don't be silly, Linda! Your name would get you in anywhere!"

"I'm not so sure of that. We fliers aren't much here, where they have a world of their own and so many celebrities."

The girls walked through a hall to a beautiful reception room, where a "publicity" girl, who looked like an actress herself, took Linda's card and passed into an office to the right.

In a moment she returned with the information that the girls might go into the office.

"Mr. Von Goss is out, but his secretary will see you," she said. "Mr. Leslie Sprague."

"You do the talking, Dot," begged Linda, as they left the room.

"Be yourself!" commanded her companion. "You can fly over the Atlantic Ocean alone, and you're afraid of an insignificant little secretary!"

Linda laughed. What would she ever do without Dot to restore her courage whenever a fit of shyness overtook her? Holding her head high, she marched into the office where the secretary was sitting.

The latter, a young man of medium height, with a blond moustache, stood up as the girls entered. He opened his mouth to speak—but continued to keep it open without saying anything for a moment.

“There’s some mistake,” he finally managed to stammer.

Linda laughed, quite at ease.

“There’s been a *big* mistake,” she said. “And your director, Mr. Von Goss, I believe his name is, has made it. I am the real Linda Carlton, and he has signed up an impostor for the flying part in his picture!”

A slight sneer spread over the young man’s features.

“I suppose you have proof, Miss—er—?” he asked in a tone that plainly showed that he did not suppose anything of the sort. How nasty he was, not even to call Linda “Miss Carlton” and at least give her the benefit of the doubt!

Dot’s chin shot up in the air.

“You don’t suppose we’d come here, without some proof, do you, Mr. Sprague?” she demanded, haughtily. “Miss Carlton is a very busy person, as you’d know if you read the newspapers.”

The man flushed at Dot’s high-handed manner; he was not used to being rebuked by others. Little as she was, Dot Crowley had a masterful way of driving straight at the mark.

Linda opened her handbag and held out her licenses.

“Just have these verified,” she said, calmly.

The young man stared at them.

“Where did you get hold of these?” he asked, slyly. “Find Miss Carlton’s handbag?”

Linda made no reply, but turned her face aside in haughty disdain, as Sprague rang a bell and summoned a young woman from another office, to whom he made a slight explanation.

“And now,” he continued after the girl had left with the cards, “what do you propose to do about it—if your identity should be established?”

“Simply have proof that you will remove my

name from the pictures, and print a statement saying that you had been misled."

Mr. Sprague smiled sarcastically.

"You want the part yourself, I suppose?"

"I do not," replied Linda, firmly. "I have neither time nor inclination to go into the moving pictures. Your actress can play the part—under her own name, whatever it is."

"Mr. Von Goss would never consent to that. The girl isn't much of an actress. He just engaged her for the value of the publicity. And, if she should prove to be an impostor, I'm sure he wouldn't want her."

"Well, that's not my affair," concluded Linda, rising. "Please get my licenses back for me now, Mr. Sprague, and when you have proof, Mr. Von Goss can communicate with me at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles."

"Wait a minute—wait a minute," cautioned Sprague, smugly. "We can't verify that license in five minutes. The other girl also had licenses in the name of Miss Linda Carlton, and the two will have to be compared, in order to find out which is a counterfeit!"

"Why, that's ridiculous!" exclaimed Dot.

“People can’t counterfeit U. S. Government licenses!”

The secretary smiled in his superior manner.

“Real counterfeiters can counterfeit anything,” he informed them.

“Then let me have mine back until we can place them side by side with this other girl’s,” demanded Linda.

Sprague shook his head.

“I’m sorry, madam, but it’s too late to do that now. They have already been handed over to our private detective, I’m sure.”

“How soon will he give them back?” asked Dot.

“Tomorrow, probably.”

“Where is this double of mine?” questioned Linda, with astonishing directness. “On the lot?”

“No. She’s at Spring City now—or rather, on her way to the coast. She’s due here tomorrow afternoon, flying into the Los Angeles airport, to begin her part in the rehearsals.”

“We’ll be there to meet her,” announced Linda, with determination. “What time?”

“Three o’clock. I’ll—meet you.”

Reluctantly the girls left the building, for

they hated to go without the licenses, and walked out into the bright sunshine.

“What a pest that man is!” exclaimed Dot. “Of all the smug, self-satisfied, little tin-gods, he’s the worst I ever met.”

“He was rather unpleasant,” agreed Linda. “But he probably likes the false Linda, and believes in her. So he treats us as criminals.”

“I suppose that’s it. But he didn’t have to be so nasty about it. And the ridiculous way he tried to trip you up, asking where you got hold of Miss Carlton’s licenses. It made my blood boil.”

“He’s not worth getting excited over, Dot, for after all, it will be Mr. Von Goss who will decide the thing. Let’s forget him now, and go to one of these spiffy restaurants for lunch. Don’t you hope we see some of the stars?”

They sauntered along leisurely, looking at the people they passed, wondering whether they were actors and actresses. But it was confusing, for every girl here seemed to be pretty, and every man handsome. Indeed, the stenographers and waitresses were no doubt girls who had won beauty contests at home, only to come to Hollywood to find that beauty was as com-

mon as blades of grass, and that there was more to getting into the films than that. But of course these girls with the jobs—any jobs—were the lucky ones. Thousands of others must have returned home penniless.

The restaurant Linda and Dot selected was a charming one, not far from several of the studios, and the girls entered it with subdued excitement. Although it was crowded, the head waiter succeeded in finding them a little table by the wall, where they could eat and watch their fellow-diners.

For a few minutes, while they sipped their tomato cocktails, their eyes wandered about the softly lighted room, recognizing nobody in particular. Then, all of a sudden, Dot pinched Linda's arm.

“That's Joan Crawford!” she whispered.

“Where?”

“Over there—to the left.”

“That girl with glasses?”

“Yes. She wears them a lot in public, they say, so that people won't recognize her. But I'm sure it's she. And there's her husband, sitting down beside her now. Anybody'd know him.”

Linda nodded, and feasted her eyes on one of Hollywood's most celebrated and charming couples.

"And here comes Marlene Dietrich!" exclaimed Linda. "With that director she's so fond of. She is pretty, isn't she?"

"Yes, only I like our own actresses better than those foreigners. They always seem so affected."

"How about Claudette Colbert? You like her, don't you?" asked Linda, jealously. She had a great admiration for the French ever since her delightful reception in Paris.

"Yes, of course. . . . Oh, look, Linda—there's Dimples!"

"Dimples? You mean June Collyer?"

"No, Stupid! A masculine Dimples. Gable, of course."

"So it is! Wouldn't Sara Wheeler be thrilled if she were here? She's wild about him."

"I heard he was getting a divorce. If you stayed around here, Linda, and took that part, you might have a chance."

Linda laughed.

“The last thing I’d ever want to do is marry a movie actor!”

“I guess you’re right at that,” agreed Dot, sensibly. “Their marriages don’t often take.”

The girls made their lunch last as long as they could, and when they had finished they decided to go to a movie. For although Hollywood is the town where they make pictures, they also have many gorgeous picture palaces. Both Linda and Dot felt proud to know that they were having first chance at seeing a show which their friends in Spring City probably could not view until many months later.

After the performance was over they took the bus back to Los Angeles and went straight to their room to dress elaborately for dinner. They were almost ready when the telephone on the tiny table between their beds jingled impatiently.

It was Mr. Von Goss, the director of the Apex Film Corporation, the man whom they had hoped to see instead of that unpleasant secretary.

“May I come over and see you right after dinner, Miss — er — Carlton?” he asked.

“Sprague has just told me the news, and I want to learn all I can about it at once.”

“Certainly,” agreed Linda. “I shall be glad to see you as soon as possible.”

Linda replaced the receiver and turned to Dot.

“You know what I’ve been thinking? This girl can’t look exactly like me, or Mr. Sprague wouldn’t have noticed the difference at once. Instead, he’d have greeted me more like a friend. But you remember—he opened his mouth in surprise.”

“That’s right. Of course we couldn’t judge much from her picture, with that helmet on. She was your build and your type, Linda. Light curly hair, and the same kind of nose.”

“I’m dying to see her.”

“So am I. But we shall tomorrow.”

“Well,” continued Linda, “it’s going to be interesting to get Mr. Von Goss’s reaction. At any rate, he was a lot more polite over the telephone than his secretary.”

The man arrived about nine o’clock, and Linda heard herself being paged just as she and Dot came out of the dining-room.

“Hadn’t I better slip off?” suggested the latter, in a whisper.

“No, indeed!” protested Linda. “I need your moral support.”

Mr. Von Goss was a stout man of past middle-age, heavy set, with a big jaw and a pair of keen blue eyes—obviously a man of power in his own field. Nevertheless, he looked thoroughly disturbed over the matter which had just been brought to his attention by his secretary.

“You claim to be Miss Carlton?” he inquired, as Linda came up to him in the hotel lobby.

“Yes,” replied Linda. “And this is my friend, Miss Crowley. Shall we go into one of those little parlors where we can talk?”

The director nodded, and Linda led the way into a small room that was unoccupied at the moment.

“Er—will you have a cigarette, Miss—er—Carlton?” he inquired.

“No, thank you,” answered Linda. “But you go ahead and smoke, Mr. Von Goss.”

The man lighted a cigar.

“This is bad business,” he said. “If what

you claim is true, and we have signed up the wrong young lady."

"You are satisfied with my proofs?" asked Linda, hoping that he had brought back her licenses.

"Can't tell yet. The other girl certainly looks like all the newspaper pictures I've ever seen of the famous aviatrix. If she isn't Linda Carlton, she certainly fooled me—and my secretary, too."

"Do I look like my pictures?" inquired Linda, demurely.

Mr. Von Goss surveyed her critically.

"Not so much as the other girl," he replied, with a smile. "But of course you're in evening dress, and the other girl always wears flying suits."

"She would," put in Dot, cryptically.

"And, as Mr. Sprague suggested," added Mr. Von Goss, "there's the possibility that the real Miss Carlton's licenses were stolen—and that by you—or anyone else!"

"Oh, that Mr. Sprague!" exclaimed Dot, with the utmost disdain.

"There are two things to do," announced Linda, who had already come to a definite con-

clusion. "Get the two of us together, and have some one who knows us in aviation pick out the real Linda Carlton—or—"

"But Mr. Sprague, and some fliers he knows, have already identified our Miss Carlton," interrupted the director. "It was Sprague who looked her up, and brought her into the production."

"Then we'll have to resort to the only other suggestion I have, if you can't decide on our license cards . . . It so happens that I am the only woman in the United States to hold an airplane mechanic's license. . . . Now, my cards could be stolen, but not my knowledge. So my idea is this: Have some good airplane mechanic give us both an examination, and only the real Linda Carlton will pass."

The director smiled broadly at the suggestion. It was an ingenious plan, and it appealed to his sense of the dramatic.

"I believe you, Miss Carlton. I think you must be the right girl, or you would never make such a suggestion. We'll try the thing out tomorrow. When the other girl arrives at two o'clock, as she wired. I'll take you to the airport to meet her."

“Two o'clock?” repeated Linda. “But Mr. Sprague said ‘Three’!”

“He must have made a mistake. He told me two. . . . Now, how would you girls like to go to a reception with me? One of the stars is giving a house-warming at her new place at Beverly Hills, and I think I can ring you in on it, if you'd care about it.”

“We'd love it!” cried Dot, jumping up excitedly. “But please wait until we put on our very best dresses, Mr. Von Goss.”

CHAPTER V**THE VANISHING "DOUBLE"**

THE home of the star where the reception was held was the most gorgeous place that Linda and Dot had ever seen. It was more like a palace than a home—out in the rich, exclusive Beverly Hills section, among those of other famous actors and actresses whose salaries soared into the thousands. Compared to it, the Claverings seemed almost paupers, yet they were the wealthiest people Linda had ever known.

“It’s just like a fairy-tale,” whispered Dot, as the girls left their evening cloaks in a beautiful blue satin boudoir. “But what is there for a girl like this to look forward to? Why, she has everything!”

“Almost too much,” said Linda.

“But her fame probably won’t last more than ten years at the most. I read somewhere that even that is a long time for an actress. After

that she has to take character parts, and 'what have you'."

"That seems tragic—giving up what you like to do best. I expect to fly till I die."

"That's just what your Aunt Emily says—only she means it differently. That you'll meet your death in the air."

Linda laughed, and she and Dot hastened to join Mr. Von Goss, who was waiting for them at the foot of the marble staircase.

"I sort of feel as if we were butting in," whispered Linda. "Do I look terribly countrified—or small-townish?"

"My dear, you're as pretty as any star here, and lots prettier than some," replied Dot, reassuringly.

"Well, you surely look sweet in that peach chiffon, Dot. You look like Paris itself."

"Of course I do!" laughed the other girl. "I'm not going to have any inferiority complex. And don't you, either, Linda!"

Taking them into his charge, Mr. Von Goss led the girls about the luxurious rooms, introducing Linda to everybody as the most famous girl flier in the world. It was evident from his

manner that he was entirely convinced that she was the real Linda.

The effect of the reception as a whole was startling, overpowering. Linda felt almost as if she wanted to gasp for breath, so overcome was she by the brilliancy of it all. It was only when she met Ann Harding, her favorite actress, that she really felt at home.

Miss Harding was amazingly beautiful—far lovelier than she seemed on the screen, if such a thing were possible. Her rich, low voice was charming, her complexion perfect, her golden hair like the pictures of a fairy queen. Yet there was something sad in her beautiful brown eyes. She and her husband had recently parted.

“Oh, I am so thrilled to meet you, Linda Carlton!” she said, holding Linda’s hand in hers. “I am only an amateur flier, but I love it so. And I have read about every single thing you have ever done.”

Linda blushed deeply at the praise; she wished she could summon courage to tell Miss Harding that she was her favorite star, but she was too shy to utter the words. She was afraid it might sound like idle flattery, thought up on the spur of the moment.

Dot, however, came to her rescue.

“You’re Linda’s favorite actress, Miss Harding,” she announced, calmly. “She goes to see all your pictures—two or three times. Especially the one where you played a character named ‘Linda.’ Do you remember?”

“Indeed I do,” replied Miss Harding. “And I loved that part.”

The three girls sat down in a corner and actually were able to talk flying without any interruption for about ten minutes. Then someone came to claim Miss Harding, and Mr. Von Goss appeared for his protegees.

Nothing was said, during the entire reception, of the trouble Linda was in, or of the fact that another girl was actually playing her part. The director had asked the girls not to mention the fact, and they were glad to accede to his wishes.

He took them to another room, a spacious hall with a beautiful shiny floor and a marvelous orchestra, and introduced some younger men to them, so that they could enjoy the dancing. Then a sumptuous supper was served, and the party broke up before midnight.

“I never thought the reception would be over

so early, Mr. Von Goss," remarked Dot, as the director drove the girls back to their hotel in his car. "I always thought Hollywood went in for wild parties."

The man shook his head.

"No. If anything, the stars keep earlier hours than ordinary people. Many of them have to be on location early in the morning, and their work is long and tiring. All the considerate hostesses arrange for their parties to be early affairs."

"One more mistaken idea shot to pieces," laughed Dot.

"We've had a marvellous time, Mr. Von Goss," said Linda, as the car stopped at the Ambassador. "We never can thank you enough. And I'm so glad we could go tonight, for we'll probably be flying home tomorrow."

The man raised his eyebrows.

"I'm not so sure we can clear things up by then. But I hope so. At any rate, I'll meet you both at the airport at two o'clock in the afternoon."

The girls said good night to Mr. Von Goss and went to their room, but they found that

they were not sleepy. The party had been too exciting to settle down and forget it so soon.

"It does kind of get into your blood," remarked Linda, as she took off her most elaborate evening gown. "All the rush and splendor and excitement, I mean."

"Weakening?" teased Dot.

"You mean go into pictures myself, if I had the chance? No—never! Why, you can't tell me Ann Harding's happy. Or Joan Crawford. . . . No, it's not satisfying, like flying. I know what I love best, and I mean to stick to it!"

"Wise girl!" was the comment. "But you surely have Mr. Von Goss worried."

"No wonder. He says he advanced that other girl fifteen thousand dollars, just for the use of my name, and he's already spent at least a hundred thousand on the story and the sets."

"It seems as if you just couldn't let him down, Linda."

"I'm not letting him down. I never made any promises to him. He's being let down because he was so careless."

For at least an hour the girls continued to discuss the party and the stars, until at last

they settled down to sleep, thankful that they had no need to get up early in the morning.

They combined breakfast and lunch the following day at noon, and went to the flying field a little before two o'clock to be on hand when the false Linda should arrive.

Linda was intensely excited. She tried over and over to picture to herself what this meeting would be like, whether the girl would be humble and sorry, whether she would try to work on Linda's sympathies by telling of some pressing need she had for money, or whether she would be flippant and self-assured, still insisting that she was the real Linda Carlton.

Mr. Von Goss's car appeared shortly after Linda and Dot arrived, and they recognized Mr. Leslie Sprague in the back seat. Both men nodded to the girls, who had dismissed their taxi and were standing beside one of the hangars, talking to an attendant.

"See your names in the paper, girls?" he was asking them.

"No. When?" inquired Dot.

The mechanic picked up a newspaper and handed it to them. There was a picture, somewhat poor, to be sure, of Linda and Dot in their

flying suits and an account of their arrival, recalling the incident of their strange landing at Kansas City. Underneath were the names, "Miss Sallie Slocum and Miss May Manton."

"How did they ever get that picture?" demanded Dot.

"Snapped it when you weren't looking. Those newspaper reporters are up to all sorts of tricks. The beacon light is bright, and he had a special camera."

Linda looked serious.

"This may make trouble for us, Dot," she said, in a low voice.

The director and his secretary got out of the car and advanced towards the girls just as an airplane loomed into view. Linda stared excitedly at the sky, trying to make out what kind of plane it was. It was not an autogiro.

"There she is!" shouted Mr. Von Goss, and Mr. Sprague took off his hat and waved it violently into the air.

"The secretary's pretty keen about the false Linda, or I miss my guess," whispered Dot, in her companion's ear. "Look how excited he is! How wildly he's waving!"

The aviatrix, who was just overhead, sud-

denly banked her plane, and made a turn to the left. Then she nosed her plane higher into the air.

“Doing some stunts for us!” exclaimed Mr. Von Goss. “She’s a great little flier, all right—”

“She’s—she’s going away!” faltered Linda, in deepest disappointment.

“Probably forgotten something,” remarked Leslie Sprague, casually. “I was almost certain, anyhow, that she said three o’clock—not two. She’ll most likely be back at three.”

“You mean to say we’ll have to wait a whole hour?” demanded Dot, as the plane disappeared in the distance.

“That’s up to you,” returned Sprague, nonchalantly.

Mr. Von Goss reached into his pocket and extracted a clipping. It was the newspaper picture of Dot and Linda, with the fictitious names under it.

“Sprague showed me this,” he said, handing the clipping to Linda, with a suspicious look in his eyes.

Linda trembled in spite of herself, but Dot immediately explained how it had happened.

Mr. Von Goss, however, looked doubtful of the truth of the story, and Sprague listened with a nasty grin on his face.

“We’ll have to talk this over later,” the director said finally. “I have an appointment now. As soon as the girl arrives, you better all come straight to the studio, where we can compare licenses, and so on.”

“Where is mine?” demanded Linda.

“Sprague’s keeping it. He’ll hand it over when the time comes.”

With a brief nod of good-bye, the two men drove away together, and the girls stood watching them in dismay.

“Something tells me that that young lady won’t be back here,” Dot said dismally.

“I’m afraid not. Maybe she even saw us, for her plane was pretty low. And if she had glasses—”

“Of course she had glasses! No girl who plays a tricky game like this one is going to go about unprepared. It would be like a gangster without a gun.”

They waited impatiently for over an hour, but nothing happened, and even the men did not return. Other planes flew into the busy

airport, landed and took off, but there was no sign of Linda's "double."

Bored with the inactivity, they strolled over to the hangar where the Ladybug was housed, and looked her over.

"I'd fly over to the studio if I only had my licenses," said Linda. "But I hate to break laws—even though it isn't my fault."

"That man has no right to keep them!" stormed Dot. "I'll bet Sprague's at the bottom of this."

"He's still trying to protect his girl-friend, I'm sure of that. . . . Well, Dot, we may as well go back to the hotel, for if she should arrive, I feel confident that Mr. Von Goss would call us there."

Linda's confidence, however, was sadly misplaced. For no one at the studio called to inform her that the other girl landed her plane right on the set a little after three o'clock.

With the neatness of a born flier, she brought her plane to the ground, climbed out of the cockpit and strolled into Mr. Von Goss's office. The director had not yet returned, but Sprague was sitting at his desk. In a few words he ex-

plained the situation, but before the girl could make any reply, Mr. Von Goss walked in.

“You’ve heard the story, Miss—Carlton?” he asked, hesitating a little over the name.

The girl, who really resembled Linda to a remarkable degree, laughed and shrugged her shoulders.

“I’m used to things like that,” she said. “It used to worry me at first, but I never pay any attention to them now. Why, Mr. Von Goss, you can see for yourself how absurd the claim is! The girl’s real name—Sallie Slocum—has been printed in the newspaper twice.”

“Yes, of course that’s true. But how about those license cards?”

“Your detective will soon prove them counterfeits. And the signatures forged.”

Still, the man hesitated.

“The other girl said something about taking a test. Said she was the only licensed mechanic in the country. That made it sound pretty genuine to me.”

Again the girl laughed.

“That was a clever ruse,” she said. “But probably Miss Slocum has passed that test since I did, and thinks she knows more than I

would. . . . No, Mr. Von Goss, I haven't time to fool around here taking tests. I've got to be on my way tomorrow. So if you want me in the picture, you'll have to let me go through my stunts now."

"I don't see how it can be done—" began the director.

"Very well, then," agreed the girl. "I'd better give you back your check, because I'm really too busy to wait around here. After all, the money doesn't mean much to me—and I don't need the publicity!"

Mr. Von Goss looked at her keenly. She must be the real Linda, he thought, or she certainly wouldn't talk like this. It never occurred to him that she was acting.

"No—I don't want to give up now. We'll go through with your part of the show . . . Sprague, get the people on the wire. . . ."

And so, while Linda and Dot were patiently waiting for their telephone call at the hotel, the impostor almost completed her part in the picture, promising to return for only a couple of hours' work in the morning.

CHAPTER VI

THE FORGED SIGNATURE

“GOOD morning, Miss Slocum,” said Mr. Sprague, smugly, as Linda and Dot entered the studio at Culver City the following day.

Linda winced at the name, and looked around her, to see whether another girl could be entering at the same time. But there was no one except a strange young man sitting in the corner, who couldn't possibly be “Miss Slocum.” The secretary was evidently giving her a dig; perhaps he was trying to trap her by calling her by the name which Dot had manufactured on the spur of the moment at Kansas City, and which had been repeated by the newspapers.

“Trying to be funny, Mr. Sprague?” inquired Dot, scathingly.

The stranger in the corner arose from his seat.

“This is Mr. Bertram Chase, of the police,”

Sprague announced, calmly. "Miss Slocum and Miss Manton."

The girls regarded the young man questioningly. He was in plain clothes—not an ordinary policeman.

"A detective," explained Sprague, simply.

Dot became impatient; she wanted to get to the point of their visit.

"We should like to meet the aviatrix who calls herself Linda Carlton," she announced, in a business-like tone. "Has she come in yet?"

"She is on the set now," replied Sprague. "Going through her stunts. She has only a small part in the picture, so it can all be done at once."

"Will you kindly take us out where she is?" asked Linda.

"In a minute, sister," returned the man, condescendingly. "But we have some business with you first."

Linda's expression became freezing. She could not bear this insolent young man. He smiled in an irritating manner.

"We have examined your licenses, Miss Slocum," he said. "And we believe the signatures have been forged. The real Miss Carlton

brought hers today, and we compared the two. There is no doubt that hers is genuine.''

“What?” demanded Linda, in horror.

“Let us see them!” demanded Dot, entirely unconvinced.

Mr. Sprague nodded.

“Our friend, Mr. Chase, has them now. He will let you look at them.”

The young man, who could not have been a day over twenty-five, looked extremely embarrassed. Not like a hard-boiled detective at all, Linda thought. Indeed, he flashed her a look of sympathy, as if he did not share in Sprague's accusation. Still, it was his business, and he had to go through with it.

He fumbled in his pockets and produced two cards, identical at a glance. The same numbers, the same printing—and what looked like the same signatures.

“Don't let them out of your hands, Chase,” warned Sprague, evidently determined to be as nasty as possible.

“You see, ladies,” Chase said, almost apologetically. “This signature is forged.” He held up one of the cards. “Look at the capital ‘L’. It hasn't been copied quite right.”

"Of course it hasn't!" cried Dot. "But the other one is yours, Linda."

"Yes," agreed Linda, trembling in spite of her innocence, "I remember that mud-spot on mine. I got it on that treasure-hunt that Mr. Clavering planned, from Green Falls last summer."

"Odd," remarked Sprague, sarcastically. "That is the very mud-spot the real Miss Carlton identified her card by!"

"What do you propose to do?" demanded Dot, now thoroughly exasperated.

"Hold Miss Slocum under bail," replied Sprague. "For forgery."

Dot burst into a peal of laughter.

"It's too absurd!" she exclaimed.

The young detective looked exceedingly uncomfortable.

"Shall we go out on the lot?" he suggested. "And see the stunts?"

"O. K. by me," agreed Sprague.

"Are we to wear hand-cuffs?" inquired Dot, flippantly.

Sprague gave her a withering look.

"You are not being held at all, Miss Man-

ton," he said. "We're not concerned under what names you care to travel."

The young detective fell back and walked across the lots with the girls.

"I believe you are innocent, Miss—Carlton," he said, his brown eyes already showing devotion to Linda. "Of course I have to take your money for bail, but I'm sure it will be all cleared up soon. I think that the other girl is the impostor."

"Oh, thank you, Mr. Chase!" cried Linda, the tears dangerously near to her eyes at this expression of sympathy.

The group reached the lot, where the picture was being rehearsed. It looked so interesting, so thrilling,—had it been under any other circumstances, the girls would have only been too delighted at the opportunity. But now they could think only of the horrible fix they were in, with not a friend in this strange city to vindicate them.

Mr. Von Goss, who was buzzing busily about the lot, paid no attention at all to Dot and Linda—not even a formal nod of greeting as he passed them by. He had evidently decided that they were impostors, who had cleverly deceived

him, thereby securing for themselves an evening's unusual entertainment at his expense. Therefore, he preferred not to recognize them at all. The deliberate cut hurt Linda, for she had liked and admired the older man, and had found him exceedingly interesting.

The moving-picture aviatrix, however, was going through all sorts of stunts in a silver Moth, which had been brightly painted and decorated. Linda stood still, gazing at her enviously. Not that she wanted to be in the picture, but she would always rather be in the air than on the ground. And it looked now as if she were to be chained to the earth for several days to come, unless she or Dot could think of a way out of their difficulties.

"The girl's too low!" cried Chase suddenly, in horror.

Linda watched her; she certainly was dangerously near to the ground. The roar of her motor was deafening. But, by a stroke of luck, she regained control, and abruptly pointed her plane upward, climbing without disaster.

"She's good," admitted Linda, in all fairness.

"Not so good as she looks," remarked Chase.

“I happen to know that plane and it will take a lot of punishment. But she’ll do that little stunt once too often.”

“You’re a flier too, Mr. Chase?” inquired Linda.

“Yes,” he replied. “I’m a secret-service man, on the air force of the police.”

He looked right into Linda’s eyes, as if to tell her that his love of flying was another bond of sympathy between them.

“How did you happen to be called in—on an unimportant case like ours?”

“I’m here on something else. Connected with another case. And I know Mr. Von Goss personally, so he asked me to help him out.”

“I see . . . I suppose I shouldn’t ask you for advice, Mr. Chase—but—I feel as if you would help me, if possible. What would you do if you were in my place?”

“Wire to somebody well known in aviation circles, who can come and identify you as *the girl who flew the Atlantic alone*. Because that is the important thing. That’s why Von Goss is paying the aviatrix thirty thousand dollars for a small part in one picture. Just because of that one fact!”

“Then friends wouldn’t help—in establishing my identity?”

“No. They ought to be people in aviation.”

Dot interrupted this conversation, by suddenly grasping Linda’s arm. “Look at Sprague!” she cried. “Look at the way he’s waving that hat of his to his girl-friend! Now what do you suppose the idea of that is?”

At the mention of his own name, the secretary turned to the girls.

“Miss Carlton is supposed to fly away—be lost to sight now,” he informed them, calmly. “It isn’t likely she’ll come back and land here, for that finishes her part.”

“You mean we’re not to see her?” demanded Dot. “That looks suspicious to me!”

“Oh, yeah?” returned Sprague. “Well, don’t flatter yourselves that Miss Linda Carlton has time to waste on a couple of upstarts from Toonerville, or wherever it was you came from. She’s a busy girl!”

Linda sighed deeply as she watched the plane disappear entirely from view. There was nothing to do now; Sprague and Von Goss were both against her. She might as well go back to the hotel.

“Come to the hotel this afternoon for that check for bail,” she said to Chase. “I’ll have it ready.”

Then, with a nod of farewell, she and Dot left the lot and went into a restaurant at Culver City for their lunch. But this time they were not interested in seeing the stars. Their own problems were too pressing.

“If I could only get in touch with Daddy,” said Linda, as she nibbled at her salad. “But I don’t know where he is, and I should hate to alarm Aunt Emily by telling her that I am being held under bail. No . . . I guess the best idea is to wire Mr. Eckert.”

“That’s the stuff!” approved Dot. “Why not go over to that telephone and do it now, while I order something for dessert?”

Linda took the suggestion, and fifteen minutes later the girls started back for their hotel in Los Angeles. They felt like prisoners, unable to come and go at will. As a matter of fact, Dot was still as free as air, but she had no thought of deserting Linda.

They bought the afternoon paper on their way back to the hotel, and when they reached their room, Dot spread it out on her bed to read.

But the first item that met her eye made her stare in horror. It was Linda's picture, right on the front page, with the caption

"Miss Sallie Slocum, impersonating Linda Carlton," and underneath it, the whole dishonest story.

She read it in rising anger, determined to destroy it before Linda should see it. But her companion, noticing the look on her chum's face, crossed the room and saw it for herself.

"Not a soul will believe it is really I!" she exclaimed. "Because it doesn't look a whole lot like me."

"No, it certainly doesn't. It must be that same picture the reporter took of us both at the airport, the day we landed here in Los Angeles. Only I'm cut off. I'm not news any more."

"No, you're free, Dot."

"Yet it's all my fault!" She wound her arms around Linda. "Darling, I just can't tell you how sorry I am for that silly prank!"

Linda patted her hand.

"Don't think of it as your fault, Dot. That name business is only a side-issue. That girl would have gotten away with it, no matter what

we did. She'd have thought up something else if she hadn't had that to play on."

"But I played right into her hands."

"Perhaps. Only, any girl who would go to all this trouble to invent such a dishonest scheme would have succeeded somehow. Why, the licenses were really the most important thing. But how she ever managed to get them exchanged without that smart Sprague noticing, is more than I can account for."

"Well, you must remember he wasn't prejudiced against her as he was against you. He trusted her, so he probably wasn't watching her closely."

"I detest that man," said Linda.

"So do I," agreed Dot.

"Well, this isn't getting us anywhere," remarked Linda, with a yawn. "I think a nap would do us good."

So, wisely acting upon the suggestion, the girls slept until Mr. Chase called at five o'clock for Linda's check for one thousand dollars for bail.

"Which I hate to have to take," he said, apologetically. "But I expect to give it back to you soon!"

CHAPTER VII

STOLEN !

LINDA and Dot both felt terribly depressed, in spite of their luxurious surroundings. Indeed, both girls had showed more spirit on that deserted island in the Atlantic Ocean, where they had been stranded without any plane during the early summer. When both their food and their water supply were limited, and the chances of survival were small. But now there was nothing to do but wait—wait in this strange, lonely city, where their only friends—Mr. Von Goss and Mr. Chase—had turned out to be enemies. And now Mr. Chase was going away, flying south on important business, so that even he would be lost to them.

“But you will soon be free,” he had said, after he had heard that Linda had wired for Mr. Eckert.

“In time to stop that picture’s being shown, do you think?” inquired Linda. “I understand

that the rest of it was completed, and that all that had to be filmed was my double's part."

"Yes, I believe that's what Von Goss said. But surely it won't be released for a month or so. I shouldn't worry. You do hate publicity, don't you?" he asked, sympathetically.

"I have always tried to shun it," answered Linda. "But it seems that I am being punished now."

But the young man had gone, and the girls were feeling very blue.

"We've got to pull ourselves together!" announced Dot, after a few minutes of somber silence. "Let's step out and go to a show to-night! After all, you paid that thousand dollars bail, and we might as well get some fun out of it."

"True," admitted Linda.

"Not a picture this time. A theatre. I'm sick of movies."

"So am I."

"And let's make a rule, with a forfeit of five dollars, if either of us mentions that aviatrix, or Sprague, or any other vermin we have met around the studio, we have to pay the other! Is it a go?"

“Does that include Mr. Chase?” asked Linda, slyly.

Dot poked her companion under the chin.

“I suppose not,” she agreed. “You couldn’t exactly describe him as ‘vermin’ . . . And besides, I can see that you were rather smitten. And did he fall for you? Whew!”

Linda blushed.

“He is a nice young man, don’t you think so, Dot?”

“Of course I do. But poor Ralph! How jealous he’d be, if he only knew!”

“Ralph will be furious because I didn’t wire to him to help us out. But after all, he’s only a personal friend, and of course his assertions about my innocence wouldn’t carry much weight.”

“We’re agreed, then,” said Dot, as she began to dress for dinner, “that the tabu subjects are Von Goss, movies, Sprague, and your double. At five dollars apiece!”

Linda laughed, but she felt much better. Trust Dot to find some fun in every situation, no matter how unpleasant or dangerous it seemed. They were able to get seats at a very good play, and in the excitement of the mystery

involved, they forgot all about their own troubles, and had no need to worry about the forfeit.

It was lucky indeed that they were able to enjoy their evening, for the next morning held a most unpleasant surprise for them. They had gone for a walk after breakfast and returned to the hotel about eleven o'clock, hoping for some word from Mr. Eckert.

The telephone rang and Linda picked it up gaily, expecting it to be the message. But it proved to be a message of a very different sort: a summons from a police-court in Los Angeles!

"The officer wants you to come downstairs immediately, Miss Carlton," the operator told her.

"I'm going too," announced Dot, following her companion into the elevator.

A uniformed policeman was waiting for Linda in the lobby. He was a rough, uneducated person of the lower class, evidently accustomed to bullying his suspects into submission. He did not return Linda's feeble "Good morning," but merely extended a piece of paper with his right hand.

"Your bum check!" he snarled. "For bail.

You had no right to sign the name of 'Linda Carlton' anyhow, but besides that, there ain't no funds to cover it—even if you say you are the real 'Linda'."

"No funds!" gasped Linda, staring incredulously at the man. "Why, I keep five thousand dollars in my check account—just to be ready for any kind of emergencies that may come up when I'm flying about the country!"

"That's just the amount that was took out yesterday. By the real Linda Carlton." His tone was jeering, as if he were enjoying the situation as he would a play.

"Oh!" cried Linda. "This is terrible!"

"I'll say it is," agreed the policeman. "Now get your hat, and come along with me. You're goin' to jail."

The girls looked at each other in speechless amazement. This was too dreadful for words.

"Let me wire for the money," suggested Dot, suddenly. "I can get it from my father."

"Do as you like. But this here forger goes to jail—even if she is a pretty girl. That ain't a gonna help her none now!"

"Oh!"

The tears came to Linda's eyes, in spite of

her effort to hold them back. She felt dizzy and weak. It was all like a hideous nightmare, from which, try as she might, she could not awaken. She opened her mouth to speak, but only a stifled sob came. Then, with a hopeless gesture of powerlessness, she decided to do as she was told.

She turned about desperately and walked towards the elevator like a criminal going to the electric chair. Dot, still trying to think of some way to save the situation, waited, hesitating, breathing hard. It was a tense and horrible moment—until Linda walked right into the arms of her dear old friend, Mr. Eckert!

“Linda, I’m here!” he said, putting out his arms to catch her, for he could see that she was blinded by tears. “Dear child, you’re not going to faint?”

Linda looked up in a daze, too astonished to believe that he was true. Had her imagination conjured up his kindly presence? But no; Mr. Eckert’s hands were on her shoulders, supporting her, keeping her from falling. And beside him was a large, fine-looking man in a blue uniform.

“Oh!” she gasped, in joy and relief, clinging desperately to the elderly man’s hand.

“What are you doing to Miss Carlton?” demanded the stranger in uniform, of the policeman. “Hounding her with abuse?”

“This here young lady forged a name and passed a bum check,” he whimpered.

“What name?” asked the other man.

“Claims she’s Linda Carlton, with five thousand bucks in a bank, where she’s already overdrew her account.”

“She is Linda Carlton!” announced Mr. Eckert. “I can testify to that—your superior officer, James A. Brennan, can testify to my knowledge, for he knows me well. He is Chief of Police in St. Louis.”

“How did you get here so soon, Mr. Eckert?” asked Dot. “We only wired yesterday.”

“We started immediately, sensing your trouble. And flew day and night. But I see that we got here just in time.”

“Ten minutes later I’d have been wearing prison stripes!” returned Linda, now almost herself again. “Oh, Mr. Eckert, I can never thank you enough.”

"I was only too thankful to be of use, my dear child," said the kind-hearted man.

"What shall we do first?" inquired Dot, as the policeman made a move to slip away.

"Catch the thief," announced Chief Brennan. "If she has forged a check for five thousand dollars already, she must have gone away as fast as she could." He turned to the Los Angeles policeman. "Go and inform your station of this as fast as you can. . . . And meanwhile, we'll go straight to the studio of the Apex Film Corporation and find out what we can about her from the director."

The policeman departed, and Linda asked Mr. Eckert whether he weren't terribly hungry and tired.

"Hungry, yes, but I haven't had time to think about being tired yet. I want to get things all straightened out for you first, before I consider sleeping. We will arrange for a couple of rooms and order a meal before we go to Hollywood."

In an incredibly short time the men reappeared from their rooms and ate a hasty meal that was both breakfast and lunch. Then the

whole party, the two girls, and the two older men, chartered a car for Culver City.

“Won’t it be fun to stick out our tongues at that Sprague insect?” laughed Dot, now enjoying herself hugely. “He was so condescending—so sure that the other girl was the real thing!”

“And I’m going to insist that they don’t show the picture under my name!” added Linda.

“It’ll serve Mr. Von Goss right. I’m glad he’s losing money. Remember how snippy he was to us yesterday, on the lot?”

“He certainly was. Wouldn’t even speak to us!”

“He may get his money back when we catch the impostor,” remarked Chief Brennan. “She can’t have had a chance to spend much of it.”

“I’ll wager she bought that plane that she was doing stunts with,” observed Linda. “It certainly was speedy. And she’d want to get out of the country as soon as possible.”

The short distance to Culver City was covered quickly in the high-powered car. Dot was the first to run into the studio when they arrived. She wanted to have the fun of saying, “I

told you so," to that "fresh Sprig," as she liked to call him.

The same "publicity girl" took their cards. But, though Mr. Von Goss was in, she informed them that Mr. Sprague was no longer with the Apex.

"Fired?" asked Dot, hopefully.

"No, I believe not. He left yesterday—to be married to Miss Linda Carlton."

"No, he didn't!" contradicted Dot. "This is Miss Linda Carlton right here, and she'd rather be dead than married to that shrimp. Your actress wasn't Linda Carlton at all—as we're just about to prove."

"Really?" remarked the girl, only slightly interested. It was a practice of hers never to frown or show emotion, lest she encourage wrinkles.

They passed on in to the director's office, and Linda introduced the two men and told her story. When she had finished, Mr. Von Goss looked extremely worried, crestfallen, even defeated. For now Linda's identity was established beyond a doubt.

"How then do you account for this license?"

he asked, extending the one with the forged signature to Linda.

“Sprague’s doing, of course!” cried Dot, before Linda had a chance to answer. “He was in league with that girl. We just heard that they were married.”

“But how could he manage these licenses?” demanded Von Goss.

“He got hold of a blank somehow, and forged the name. Then when he had the chance to get hold of the real Miss Carlton’s, of course he exchanged them.”

The Chief of Police was listening to Dot’s logic with admiration.

“You’re a bright girl,” he said. “And you’ve figured it out just about right.” He turned to Linda. “You should never have let your own licenses get out of your hands.”

“I had no idea Mr. Sprague was dishonest,” she said. “But the worst part of it is, that now I have to fly with a false license.”

“We’ll get yours back when we catch that couple!” promised Von Goss. “Because we’ve got to catch them. Why, I paid her thirty thousand dollars for her part in the picture—and if

my picture is not shown, I'll lose thousands more . . ."

He looked terribly discouraged.

The Chief of Police rose.

"We must go back now and get to work. Have you any idea, Von Goss, where this couple went, or what kind of plane they flew in?"

"I heard Sprague say something about South America for a honeymoon," the man replied. "He told us to keep his mail for him, till he came back, as he wouldn't have any definite address. But I haven't any idea whether they expected to fly, or what kind of plane they used if they did."

"The girl didn't buy your plane—or steal it?" asked Linda.

"No. It's still out there. We needed it today for some stills."

"What kind of plane did she own when she came to the studio?"

"She didn't own any. She told me that she had left her autogiro at Spring City, and had flown west with a friend."

"And you believed every word of it!" was Dot's taunt. "And never even asked to see her

license, until we showed up and made it necessary."

"It's all true," agreed the director. "I've been a fool."

"If we only knew what kind of plane, it would be so much easier to follow and catch her," remarked Linda, sadly.

Mr. Von Goss rose from his desk, and followed the group to the door, lingering beside Linda, as if he were trying to get up courage to say something to her. For such a self-possessed man, he seemed unusually nervous.

"Miss Carlton," he said, in a humble tone, "won't you please do that part of the picture for me?" It seemed strange that a man who could tell stars what to do, should speak so deferentially to Linda.

"Oh, no, Mr. Von Goss," she replied immediately. "I couldn't possibly. I'm all keyed up for a chase. I want to catch this girl, if it's the last thing I ever do!"

"Then let me pay you, say fifty thousand dollars for the use of your name, and let me show the picture as it is. Nobody would ever guess that it isn't you. For she does look astonishingly like you."

“Wouldn't I love to see that girl!” said Dot.

Again Linda shook her head. “I don't want my name in moving-pictures, Mr. Von Goss,” she said with quiet determination. “Besides, I shouldn't like people to think I flew in the dangerous, spectacular way that girl did. It is harmful to the whole cause of aviation. No; you cannot use my name in connection with your picture.”

Von Goss knew that she meant what she said, and there was no use of any further argument. But he was in a terrible fix, and he didn't know how to get out of it without losing a great deal of money. Certainly he couldn't use the name of the girl—whatever it was—for when she was caught, the whole world would know that she was a criminal.

A solution of his problem, however, suddenly suggested itself to Linda.

“I have it, Mr. Von Goss!” she cried, turning about. “Use Ann Harding! She's a flier, and a popular actress besides. She can do the stunts, and probably will prove more of a drawing card to the public than I could hope to be.”

“Ann Harding!” repeated the man. “But she belongs to another studio.”

“Borrow her! Pay her! You’ll save your picture.”

“I believe you’re right, Miss Carlton,” he admitted, with a sigh of relief. “That ought to save the situation.”

The four visitors left the studio and hurried in their car back to the hotel. But no news of the couple had been received by any of the Los Angeles police. Linda therefore determined to pack a box of supplies and to set out, that very afternoon, on the search, inquiring at the airports they passed as they flew towards Mexico.

Just before sitting down to her late lunch with Dot, she wired the news to her aunt, informing her of her plans, and asking that additional funds be put into her checking account. Then she called the airport on the telephone.

“This is Linda Carlton,” she said. “I want you to have my autogiro in readiness for a long trip. Plenty of gas and oil. I will call for it inside of an hour.”

“Linda Carlton?” repeated the voice at the other end of the wire. “Autogiro? . . . Must be some mistake. . . . Miss Carlton flew away in her autogiro last night, about eight o’clock. She paid the bill, and said she wouldn’t be back!”

CHAPTER VIII

IN HOT PURSUIT

LINDA replaced the telephone receiver and sat motionless, staring at the wall of the hotel bedroom. The worst had happened. The autogiro was stolen. The Ladybug! Her dearest possession.

“What’s the matter?” asked Dot, realizing that her chum must have heard bad news.

In a few words Linda explained the situation.

“And the worst of it is, that girl evidently didn’t have any difficulty at all about doing it. Just walked into the airport at night and demanded the plane. They handed it over to her without so much as a question.”

For once in her life, Dot remained speechless. There was not a single word of comfort she could think of to offer to her companion.

“She’s had almost a whole day’s start,” Linda added dismally. “Here it is three o’clock, and she must have pulled out at dark last night.

She's probably out of the United States by this time. And nobody even on her trail yet!"

"Our police always catch the wrong person, anyway," remarked Dot, grimly.

"Don't be too hard on them, Dot. They're not all like that dreadful specimen that came for me this morning. And in a case like this, they would probably put the air-force on duty. Men of a much higher type."

"Like Mr. Chase, for instance."

"Yes."

"What are you going to do, Linda?"

"Call the police headquarters first. Tell them to get in touch with all the airports possible, so that any autogiros can be reported . . . But I'd like to go after that girl myself, too!"

"In what?"

"'In what?' is right! Oh, if I only had a plane! If Ted Mackay were only here—or even Ralph, with his autogiro! But do you realize, Dot, that I'm bankrupt? I can't buy a plane, or even hire one, now that that girl took everything I had in the bank."

Her companion nodded. "If somebody would only lend you one," she said. "Maybe Mr. Eckert—"

“I’ve thought of him. But he has to get back to the school immediately. Why, Dot, this is the twenty-ninth of September! We’ve wasted a whole week, just to establish the fact that I am Linda Carlton! Isn’t it just too absurd?”

“It’s the craziest thing I ever heard of. And now you’ll lose your chance at that teaching position, unless you give up trying to get your Ladybug back.”

“I can’t do that. I couldn’t give up now. No, I’ll call the police headquarters, and then I’ll wait around until Mr. Eckert wakes up from his nap. We’ll surprise the men by having dinner with them.”

It was indeed a surprise, as Linda expected, when she and Dot met Mr. Eckert and Chief Brennan in the lobby of the hotel that evening at seven o’clock. Naturally, both men thought that the girls had flown away early in the afternoon.

“I’m tied to the earth again,” Linda announced immediately. “But not by the law this time . . . That girl flew off in my autogiro!”

“No!” cried Mr. Eckert, incredulously. “Why, there isn’t anything she won’t steal!”

He smiled grimly. "Did she leave you your own clothing, Linda?"

"Yes," replied the girl. "But that's about all."

"You should have had me wakened the minute you heard the news. If you had done that, you might have been on your way by this time."

"You mean—?" gasped Linda.

"In my plane, of course. Take it and welcome, my dear child!"

Linda seized his hand and tried to stammer out her thanks. But she was too much moved by his generosity to say anything.

"How will you get back to St. Louis in time for the opening of your school?" inquired Dot.

"By the commercial air-line," replied Mr. Eckert. "Now come in and eat some dinner, and after that, you can make your plans."

It seemed to Linda almost too good to be true. To have the privilege of flying that new, fast biplane, which she had admired so much that morning. It had a cruising speed of a hundred and fifty miles an hour! Surely, in it, she could catch her own Ladybug.

"You'll start early tomorrow morning, I sup-

pose?" asked Mr. Eckert, as they seated themselves in the dining-room.

"Yes," answered Linda. "The police are already on the job, in communication with all the airports, which are to keep a watch out for all autogiros that pass overhead or land for gas. We'll find out what reports have been turned in, before we take off in the morning."

"And will you go along, Miss Crowley?"

"Certainly," replied Dot. "I'm just as anxious to recover the Ladybug as Linda is."

"It may mean dangerous business."

"It's bound to be exciting!"

After dinner Chief Brennan telephoned to the police headquarters to find out what information had been gained. Three autogiros, he learned, had been spotted, but only two of them had been stopped. Neither of these was the Ladybug. The third, it seemed, had been seen early in the day, flying southeast across California toward Arizona. Two secret-service planes had already been sent out in that direction.

With Mr. Eckert's help, Linda sketched out a course to follow. She would head straight for the city of Yuma, in the extreme south-

west of Arizona, stopping there for the first night. Then she would go over the border into Mexico.

Dot, in the meanwhile, took charge of the practical preparations for the trip. She arranged to leave their box of clothing at the hotel, and packed all the supplies for the trip. Water in gallon jugs and thermos bottles, canned food, blankets in case they were forced to camp out at night, field glasses and first-aid kit—and finally, upon Mr. Eckert's suggestion—a revolver.

The whole party breakfasted at dawn the following morning, and Mr. Eckert accompanied the girls to the airport, to sign the necessary papers for the release of his plane, the Sky Rocket. It was a beautiful new biplane, of the latest model. Painted yellow, with a companion cockpit, it stood in readiness on the runway, as if inviting Linda to climb in and fly.

Her eyes were shining in happy anticipation as she skipped forward and climbed into the cockpit to peer at the instruments. Everything for convenience and comfort seemed to be provided. Altimeter, clocks, compass, parachutes—even a wireless, with transmitting radio wires

placed inside the wings, so that messages could be sent and received.

“It’s marvellous, Mr. Eckert!” she exclaimed, as she seated herself at the controls, her hand fingering the joy-stick.

“Aren’t you even going to give her a trial flight, Miss Carlton?” inquired the mechanic, skeptically.

“Miss Carlton can pilot any plane that’s made!” replied Mr. Eckert, proudly. “She never needs any instruction. But,” he added, coming closer to Linda, “don’t forget that this isn’t an autogiro. Don’t try to land her on top of a building!”

Linda smiled.

“I only wish I had my own license,” she said.

“I shouldn’t worry about that,” returned Mr. Eckert. “The police aren’t going to make any more mistakes about arresting you.”

“I should hope not!” exclaimed Dot.

A minute later the mechanic started the motor, and Linda taxied along the runway, waving good-bye to Mr. Eckert. A few hundred feet further, and the Sky Rocket rose into the air like a bird, soaring up to the skies. The usual fog common to the early morning climate

of California had lifted, and the sun shone brightly as Linda directed her course towards the mountains. She let out the throttle to its maximum as soon as she reached a good safe height; a hundred and fifty miles an hour did not seem an abnormal speed, but it was a thrilling experience. Linda loved her own Ladybug, but after all, this was an exciting change.

Over the orange groves of southern California they passed again, then, even higher up in the air to clear the San Jacinto Mountains, over the city of Imperial—on towards Yuma. The flight was nearly four hundred miles, but Linda covered it in less than four hours. At noon she landed the Sky Rocket at the airport of Yuma, Arizona.

Being a large airport, the men had already been informed by radio of the stolen autogiro, and the attendant who came out to greet the Sky Rocket was prepared to answer Linda's questions.

"A giro stopped here yesterday for gas and oil," he said. "And we filled her up. Put a patch on one wing, but the couple wouldn't wait long enough to have it done right. That must have been about three o'clock in the afternoon."

We got the radio soon after that, to take the licenses of all the giros we got a look at."

"What did the people look like? Were they a man and a girl?" demanded Dot, excitedly.

"Yeah. A married couple, I believe."

"On their honeymoon?"

"Can't tell you that. They didn't act mushy."

Linda smiled.

"Did they give you their names?" she inquired.

"And did the girl look like—Miss Carlton?" put in Dot, before the man could answer Linda's question.

"Couldn't say she did, except that all you girl fliers look something alike. But her face was pretty dirty, and her helmet was pulled down low . . . Yeah, they gave their names. A Mr. and Mrs. Bower, of Texas."

"Oh!" gasped Linda, in disappointment. "We're looking for people named Sprague."

"They wouldn't be likely to give their right names, Linda," Dot reminded her. "Why, that girl thinks nothing of swiping a new name to fit her fancy!"

"True," admitted Linda.

"And another thing," added the attendant.

"There was a secret-service flier here this morning already. After them. A nice-looking chap, in a gray monoplane."

"Could it have been Mr. Chase?" demanded Dot.

"Yeah. I think that was the name . . . Well, he crossed the border, hot on their trail. Shouldn't be surprised if he had 'em by now, for he flew a fast plane!"

The news was encouraging, so after a bite of lunch and a hasty inspection, the girls flew away again, heading south now, avoiding the Gulf of California, and crossing over into Mexico.

They passed over the California river and continued an easterly course, avoiding the mountains near the coast, and pointing inland before they turned southeast again. From their height in the air they could not see the ground without glasses, but as Linda dipped lower, they could distinguish how barren and desolate it was. There were no trees; only short, stumpy underbrush scattered about, with big patches of bare, hard earth between. A most unattractive part of the country.

The engine of the plane continued to throb

evenly; it was in perfect condition. At least, Linda thought, her plane was giving her no worry. But then, planes were more like automobiles now; the accidents were oftener due to the pilots themselves than to faulty motors . . . But thus far, she had accomplished nothing. There had been no sign of an autogiro, or indeed of any kind of plane, since they left Arizona.

“We may be flying too high,” she remarked, as the hours passed without any success. “I’m afraid to dip too low with this plane.”

“Yes, that must be the trouble,” responded her companion. “They could come down amongst those bushes and camp for the night, and we’d never see them. It seems like a wild-goose chase to me.”

“You don’t want to give up?”

“No, not as long as we can get any news at all. And they can’t go on forever without gas. They’ll have to stop at airports every once in a while to refuel, and then they’ll be caught.”

“Some of these little Mexican places may not have been informed,” observed Linda. “If they didn’t speak English—or didn’t have a radio.”

On and on they flew, over this hot, deserted

land, so uncultivated and barren. The sun sank and twilight came on—and still no sign of a town or an airport where the girls might land.

“I’m afraid I’m lost,” Linda admitted to Dot, when it became too dim to distinguish the ground even with the aid of glasses. “I’ll have to fly lower, and look for a landing. I think I remember a place a couple of miles back.”

She circled about and began flying in the opposite direction, cautiously gliding a little nearer to the ground.

“Do you mind sleeping out tonight, Dot?” she inquired.

Her companion made a face. She had read enough about Mexican bandits not to relish the prospect.

“I suppose we’ll have to,” she said. “Anyway, we have plenty of food.”

Darkness was coming on fast; there was nothing to do but take a chance at landing. Beyond them stretched great black mountains, deep and forbidding, inhabited, they felt sure, by all sorts of wild animals. These must be avoided at any cost; so Linda went back to the spot she had selected and prepared to make a dangerous landing. How thankful she was that

she had had plenty of experience in spot landings!

Keeping the plane still high enough to maintain the glide to the spot, she combined maneuvers to accomplish her purpose. From a glide, she went into a side-slip until she lost altitude, then, as she approached the landing-mark, she gradually reduced speed with the forward slip, straightening out just as she reached the ground. And landed on the exact spot she had selected!

"Good work, Linda!" cried Dot, admiringly. Linda grinned.

"I was afraid I might be out of practice," she said. "Spoiled by my Ladybug. It's a satisfaction to know I can still land an ordinary plane. I guess she'll be all right, just here . . . Now for some food! I'm starved."

"So am I. And thirsty too . . . Where shall we make our camp?"

They looked all about them. In spite of the gathering darkness, they could see bare ground everywhere; only a few clumps of dry bushes in the distance. It was not exactly the spot one would select to camp out, if given a choice.

"Not too near the plane," said Linda.

“Though I guess we don’t need to build a fire. I don’t believe we could find any wood. No; let’s just open a can or two, and eat oranges and biscuits for tonight. Anything would taste good now.”

They prepared their meal and ate it almost in silence, for they were too weary to talk. Then, crawling into their blankets, although the night was exceedingly mild, they went to sleep under the stars.

The first faint rays of light were appearing when Linda was abruptly awakened by a familiar sound over her head. She sat up, reaching instinctively for her revolver at her side, and looking about her for some animal which might be the cause of the noise. But the sound, now more loud than before, was not that of an animal. It grew nearer, almost deafening—over her head. An airplane, of course! Now fully awake, she looked up into the skies. The plane was descending; a flashlight was turned into her face. Blinded for an instant, she looked away. Then, as she turned her gaze upon it again, she saw it on the ground. And, wonder of wonders, it was an autogiro!

Excitedly she turned to her companion. But

Dot was still sleeping peacefully. That wasn't surprising; it had always been hard to waken Dot. Alarms right beside her bed never had any effect.

"Dot!" she whispered, disentangling herself from her blanket, and edging up nearer to her chum. "Dot! Wake up!"

But Linda stopped suddenly; she couldn't say anything more. With the speed of a bolt of lightning, a man ran at her, and, grasping both Linda's hands with one of his, he clapped a wet rag over her face with the other. She had just time enough to identify her attacker as Sprague, when she fell to the ground unconscious. And, although she did not see what happened next, the same fate was accorded to Dot.

Both girls had been chloroformed!

CHAPTER IX

THE LADYBUG!

DOT was the first of the two girls to come to consciousness. With a gasp for breath, she pushed the cloth from her face and sat up. For a moment or two everything swam about her; she didn't know where she was.

She thought at first that she and Linda were on that deserted island in the Atlantic Ocean where they had been stranded early in the summer. But no; the ground was hard and dry—not a bit sandy—and there was no ocean in view. That couldn't be the explanation. For there was the Ladybug within a few hundred yards!

She glanced at Linda and saw that she was lying motionless beside her on the barren ground, her blanket thrown aside. With a cloth over her face! In sudden panic Dot pulled it off desperately. Oh, suppose Linda were dead!

“Linda! Darling!” she implored piteously,

but there was no reply, no movement from the inert figure. With a tremendous effort Dot forced herself to rise and bend over her chum.

“Tell me you aren’t dead, Linda!” she begged, hysterically.

A faint flutter of her companion’s eyelids came as a response.

With a tremendous effort, Dot reached for the thermos bottle and held water to Linda’s lips. At last the color came faintly back to the aviatrix’s face, and she smiled faintly.

“I’m—all right—Dot,” she managed to whisper. “But what happened?”

“I don’t know.”

Dot took a drink of the water herself, and felt more revived.

“Where are we?” asked Linda.

“Somewhere in Mexico. Don’t you remember? We were flying after that girl, in Mr. Eckert’s Sky Rocket, and we came down for the night.”

Linda rubbed her eyes and looked about her. And caught sight of the Ladybug, whose appearance had so amazed Dot a moment before. And rubbed her eyes, and stared again.

“Am I crazy, Dot—or is that really an autogiro over there? Or am I seeing things?”

“It’s the Ladybug,” replied Dot. “I’m positive. We couldn’t both be dreaming.”

“But how did it get here? Is that girl around?”

“I don’t hear her. Unless she’s hiding.” Dot lowered her voice to a whisper. “Have you got your revolver handy, Linda?”

Linda felt at her side, where she had put it the previous night when she went to sleep, and sure enough, it was there. And, with the touch of that revolver, memory of the scene that preceded unconsciousness returned.

“I remember now!” she cried triumphantly. “I was wakened just as it was getting light, by a big noise. I finally identified it as a plane. At first I thought it was bandits, and I recall reaching for my revolver . . . Yes . . . Then I saw it was an autogiro. It landed . . . and a man . . . it was Sprague, I’m sure . . . came and clapped that rag over my face. That’s all.”

“How ghastly!” cried Dot. “I can’t seem to remember a thing myself. I must have been sound asleep when he did it to me. But where is he now?”

“I know!” exclaimed Linda, with a sudden flash of understanding. “They must have made off in Mr. Eckert’s plane! In the Sky Rocket—for it’s gone.”

“Of course that’s it!” agreed Dot. “But how do you suppose they ever spotted us?”

“Well, you see, the Ladybug can fly much lower than we could in the Sky Rocket,” Linda explained. “They probably saw us in the air—when we didn’t see them—and followed us about till they saw where we made our landing. Then they waited for us to get to sleep, and for early morning light to help them in landing and taking off, and then descended on us with the chloroform.”

“Why do you think they wanted to swap planes?” asked Dot. “Because the Sky Rocket is faster?”

“Yes. And it wouldn’t be so easy to spot in the sky as an autogiro. Besides, by doing this, they know they will be throwing the police off the clue. Pretty clever, I’d say.”

“Those two are about the slickest pair of schemers I’ve ever heard of. There’s nothing they don’t think of.”

“And with each new trick they make a gain.

Mr. Eckert's plane is faster, newer, and more expensive than the Ladybug."

"True. But aren't you glad to have the dear old Ladybug back again?" asked Dot.

"I surely am. If she will fly. That's another thing, Dot. You know that man at the airport said that she had a damaged wing. So naturally, the Spragues would be glad to get hold of a fresh plane."

"I wonder whether they had trouble taking off," observed Dot. "It's not any too easy."

"No, but the ground's very hard. I guess they haven't had any rain here all summer . . . Come on, Dot, if you're able to walk, let's go over and see the Ladybug. I'm dying to get a look at her again."

"So am I," agreed her companion.

Walking a trifle shakily at first, and feeling extremely weak and queer after their experience, the girls went slowly to the spot where the autogiro was resting. Like her owner, she, too, looked in bad condition, as if she had been mistreated, and had travelled a great distance. And, as Linda expected, the patch on the wing was split open again.

"No wonder they swapped planes!" ex-

claimed Linda. "I guess that girl was pretty desperate. Well, thank goodness, I keep stuff on hand for repairs."

"And thank goodness you know how to do it!" added Dot, with admiration. "Any other girl would be in a fine picnic in a fix like this!"

"Speaking of picnics, don't you think we'd feel better if we ate something? I don't feel a bit sick at my stomach—only terribly weak. Breakfast might help. They didn't take our food and water, did they?"

"They didn't take what we left out for breakfast," replied the chum. "But unfortunately we left most of our stuff in the plane."

"Well, we'll have to eat sparingly. But if I work fast, I ought to be able to get off by noon, and we can surely fly till we find a place to eat."

"Have we gas?"

"Yes, I just looked. Enough to go a couple of hundred miles."

Arm in arm they went back to their little encampment and ate the food which Dot had reserved for breakfast and drank the coffee in one of the thermos bottles. The remainder of the water they decided to keep for their flight, and they still had half a dozen oranges which

Dot had purposely left out of the Sky Rocket, expecting to eat them during the morning.

Linda wasted no time. As soon as she had finished eating she set right to work on the damaged wing. It was not hard for her, for she knew every tiniest detail of the construction. How thankful she was that it was her own Ladybug that she had to repair, and not a strange plane!

Much to her delight, she found her own license cards on the seat of the cockpit. Evidently the girl had no further use for them.

After the repairs had been made to the outside of the plane, Linda tested the engine. It was not running so smoothly as she liked to hear it. A spark plug was missing. With a sigh, she set to work again.

Dot, who had cleaned up all evidences of their camp, watched her in dismal silence. The day grew hotter and hotter, the sun poured down mercilessly on Linda, bending patiently over her work while the perspiration streamed from her face. But it was fixed at last; everything was to her satisfaction.

"Let's have an orange," she suggested,

wiping her face with her handkerchief. "Oh, maybe I wouldn't like a good swim right now!"

"And we haven't even water enough to wash our faces!" lamented Dot.

"If we only had that gallon jug we put into the Sky Rocket!"

"Oh, well, we will soon find a town, now that it is light enough to find our way."

Dot brought the oranges, and they tasted good, although they had become exceedingly warm from the hot sun.

"Think we'll have any trouble taking off?" she inquired, as they finished the fruit.

"I guess not. If the Sky Rocket could get off—and she evidently did—I'm sure the Ladybug can make it. It's good hard ground all about."

Linda sounded confident, but Dot's heart was in her mouth until she saw the Ladybug actually rise from the earth and soar up into the skies—wherein lay safety.

Once again Linda's heart was singing with rapture. She had enjoyed piloting that swift plane of Mr. Eckert's, but after all, there was nothing like her beloved Ladybug. Why, the

thing was almost human, the way it responded to her touch!

Another great advantage at the present time, when the girls had lost their way, was the autogiro's ability to fly low. Now they could watch the landscape for towns and airports and landing-fields. Oh, it was good to have the Ladybug back again, if she couldn't make a hundred and fifty miles an hour!

The country was so strange, so different from anything they were used to, that, in spite of its barrenness, they watched it in fascination. They came to the mountains and Linda nosed her plane upward, over the steep slopes covered with pine forests, until she was rewarded by seeing little villages on the other side. Straw-roofed houses dotted the landscape; there was evidence of farm-life, of some kind of civilization, though just what, the girls couldn't make out from their height in the air.

Linda consulted her map, and familiarized herself with the names of several of the towns near the mountains, determined to fly on until she could find a good landing. She noticed the tracks of a railroad in the distance, and this she decided to follow, until it should lead to a sta-

tion, and be identified as a town. Her gas was growing low, but she had no fear of a forced landing. In country like this there would be plenty of opportunities for an autogiro.

Half an hour later she hovered over a small Mexican town that provided an airport, and brought the Ladybug to earth.

A man who was obviously a Mexican came forward to meet them.

"Do you speak English?" asked Linda.

The man nodded, smiling.

Reassured, the girls climbed out of the cockpit, and Dot proceeded to tell their story, asking how she could notify the police in Los Angeles in the quickest time, so as to have them pursue the Sky Rocket instead of the autogiro.

"You can send a wire immediately, right from here," the man replied. "At least—you can when the operator comes back. He's off for supper now."

"I am a wireless operator," announced Linda, calmly. "If you are willing to trust me, I can send my own message."

"O. K.," agreed the man, who was beginning

to decide that girls could do almost anything now-a-days.

“And I want to leave the autogiro here for the night, and have her filled with gas and oil,” she continued. “And go to some hotel for a meal. Can you recommend one for us?”

“There are several hotels,” he replied, proudly. “But I will send you to the best.”

It proved to be strangely unlike any hotel the girls had ever visited. It was a long, low stucco building, with stone floors on the first story, and bare boards above. The supper, too, was unlike American food, but it tasted good to the hungry girls who had had nothing but a couple of oranges since their breakfast. And the prospect of a roof over their heads, after their disastrous adventure of the night before, was extremely pleasant. After their hearty supper they sat out on the wide, roofless veranda until the night grew cool enough for sleep.

“But where do we go from here?” asked Dot, wondering whether Linda had had enough by now, and was ready to go back to Los Angeles.

“More pursuit,” returned her companion.

“I feel under greater obligations than ever to catch that thief now—for she has Mr. Eckert’s plane. I’m responsible for it. We’ll fly around to all the airports for news. Their gas supply ought to be getting low, and they’ll have to stop somewhere to fill up. That’s the clue we’ll have to follow.”

“I wish we could get back into the United States,” remarked Dot. “I don’t like the bugs here in Mexico.”

“I don’t think we can hope for that, till we catch them. They’re going to steer clear of our police.”

“I suppose you’re right,” yawned Dot. “Well, let’s go get some sleep. We can’t tell what adventures may be in front of us tomorrow.”

“No, we can’t possibly tell,” agreed Linda.

CHAPTER X

A CLOSE CALL

“I THINK,” announced Linda at the breakfast table in the Mexican hotel the following morning, “that we’ll have to cross the mountains today.”

Dot groaned.

“What a pleasant little ray of sunshine you are, Linda!” she said.

“I don’t see why you object so to the mountains—in broad daylight, I mean. If there are bears and snakes in the mountains, they can’t attack us in the air, can they?”

“So long as we just stay up in the air, it’s all right. What I don’t care about is camping out in these wild spots.”

“I don’t expect we’ll have to,” Linda assured her. “But I am taking an extra tank of gasoline, in case we can’t find a place to refuel. Meanwhile, what I want you to see about is the food, if you will.”

“I’m to make a visit to the kitchen, I suppose?” inquired Dot. She made a wry face at the cereal she was eating. “Do you know, Linda, I could bear most anything if only we never had to eat another mouthful of this hotel’s cooking.”

Linda laughed.

“I know it’s not exactly like the Ambassador. Still, it’s a lot better than nothing, and we might be very glad to have it.”

Dot did as she was asked and raided the hotel kitchen, ignoring the indignant protests of the servants. Inside of half an hour the girls were back at the airport where they had left the autogiro, and Linda was giving the Ladybug a thorough inspection, for she did not have much confidence in the mechanic’s knowledge.

“Any news of the Sky Rocket?” she asked, as she completed her work to her satisfaction.

“No, not a thing,” replied the man.

Somewhat discouraged, the girls climbed into the cockpits and Linda taxied a short distance along the runway, but left the ground so quickly that the mechanic stood there staring at the autogiro with his mouth wide open.

Linda directed her course south, aiming to

reach a larger airport before noon. Here she made a landing, refueled, and again inquired for news. A yellow biplane, it seemed, had been sighted that morning, flying low, going west towards the coast of the Gulf of California. Whether it was the Sky Rocket or not, no one could say. But at least it was a clue to follow.

“I told you we’d have to cross those mountains,” remarked Linda. “But please don’t start to worry about them yet.”

Linda changed her direction and headed the ship west, and they flew a monotonous course for a couple of hours. The sun glared down upon them, and the earth below looked parched and barren. So different from their own Ohio country in the month of October.

They reached the mountains at last, and after assuring herself that there was plenty of gas in her reserve tanks, Linda flew dauntlessly towards them. As she approached, she noted a heavy cloud bank hovering directly above the mountains, and extending so far on either side that she gave up all thought of going around it. Instead she put the ship into a sharp climb and headed resolutely into it. She held the climb until she was several thousand feet higher

to make sure of clearing the mountain safely, but as they had failed at this height to rise above the cloud, she leveled off.

Grayness was all about them, enveloping them like a blanket, and cutting off their view of either the mountains or the sun. In her powerlessness to see in this unknown region, Linda suddenly experienced a queer choking sensation, brought on by her helplessness. Scolding herself for this momentary weakness, she pulled back the joy-stick and nosed the Ladybug still higher up. But climb as she might, she could not get away from that cloud.

Dot, however, did not appear to be frightened at all. Wasn't Linda always able to get the best of almost any bad situation, even if it were an unknown mountain range in a mist? She was singing cheerfully to herself, when all of a sudden, the words died on her lips.

Another plane was approaching—was almost on top of them! They had not been able to see it, because of the cloud, or to hear it, because of the noise of their own motor. But there it was, rushing headlong at them with the relentless speed of an infuriated animal. Dot held her breath and shut her eyes.

Linda saw it too, and flashed on her lights as a signal. But it was too late for signals; only a miracle could save them. With a sudden sharp turn she banked to the left, and went into a side-slip, dropping the plane fifty feet. The other plane passed over their heads, barely missing the rotor blades.

The perspiration had collected on her face in beads, and her hands were hot and moist. It had been a narrow escape!

But it evidently wasn't over. Or could it be another plane? For the thing was almost upon her again, as if it, too, had dropped on purpose. She couldn't believe her ears. Was it that girl—and had she recognized the rotor blades of the autogiro, and was trying to force Linda to land?

Her heart in her mouth, she banked again, dropping for the second time, determined to land now at any cost. The strain had been awful the first time, but now it actually unnerved her. Inside of that cloud—on the dangerous mountain side! No; she could not take another chance, not only with her own life, but with Dot's. Wherever she came down, it couldn't be as dangerous as this.

Gradually throttling her engine down to a slower speed, she began her descent by a series of glides. All the while watching for a glimpse of the solid earth beneath her.

Down, down they came, but still there was no ground visible. They must have passed over the mountains, she decided, and were descending into a valley. Or level ground, perhaps. That thought was encouraging.

“There it is!” shouted Dot, almost hysterically. “The earth, I mean!”

Linda breathed a deep sigh of relief. Never before had she been so thankful to see it, unless perhaps the first time she had made a parachute jump.

“It must be the plateau!” she cried, joyfully. “We must have passed over the mountains!”

Gently the autogiro settled down to a landing on the level ground beneath them. It was a fertile spot in comparison with the other places in Mexico where they had landed. The earth was not nearly so parched or barren, and here and there, between the underbrush and the bare spots, a kind of coarse grass was growing. Perhaps, Linda thought, the land was used by someone for grazing.

“Quite a pleasant spot,” remarked Dot gaily, as if they had been on a picnic instead of face to face with death.

“See the mountains over there?” asked Linda, for they were out of the range of the cloud through which they had just passed.

“Yes. But they’re far enough away that I really don’t mind. If a bear wanders over to visit us, we’ll feed him some Mexican food.”

They climbed out of the cockpits, carrying their box of provisions in their arms, when they saw a sight that made them stand breathless in horror. About five hundred yards away they beheld a great mass of flame, shooting up to the sky.

“It’s a plane!” exclaimed Linda. “It must be the one we almost crashed against.”

With one thought in mind, the girls both dropped their box and started to run. Oh, if a human being were caged in that burning cockpit! It was too dreadful to think of—a death like that.

But before they had covered fifty yards of the intervening distance, they saw a parachute floating down to the earth. They stopped instantly, waiting in breathless suspense. Sup-

pose it were Sprague, with his supply of chloroform? Tensely alert, Linda pulled her revolver from her belt.

But it was not Sprague. The man who floated down let out a cry of horror when he recognized Linda and Dot. Though why he should be so horrified, the girls did not know.

The man was Bertram Chase!

He disentangled himself from his ropes, glanced at his burning plane, and let out a groan.

"You!" he cried. "And to think, I almost killed you!"

"You couldn't help that," said Linda gently. "It seems we almost did for you, too. If you hadn't jumped."

"That wasn't your fault. My plane caught on fire somehow—a leak, I think, in the gas feed. That's why I jumped . . . But that had nothing to do with you . . . But I actually tried to force you down—the second time, I mean. The first was accident."

"But why?" asked Dot, incredulously.

"I saw your rotors, the first time I passed over you. And knew it was the autogiro. And thought that girl was piloting it, of course.

How did you girls ever get hold of it again?"

"Then you didn't get the report from the Los Angeles headquarters?" inquired Linda.

"What report?"

"That we exchanged planes. My double stole our Sky Rocket, and left us the Ladybug instead."

"And got away with it?" demanded Chase.

"Yes. We're still after them. But where have you been in the meanwhile?"

"Flying around these mountains, without any touch of civilization. I even made a search on foot, but it proved to be a false clue that I was following. But tell me the story, while we take a walk over and examine my poor ship."

Briefly Dot related the facts of the night-adventure with Sprague and his wife, as the three young fliers approached the burning mass. The flames had somewhat subsided, and only a smoking, blackened frame remained.

"Was it yours, Mr. Chase?" asked Linda sympathetically, thinking how dreadful she would feel if it were the Ladybug.

"No," he replied. "It belonged to the secret service. It was an old boat, but I was fond of it. And I've lost a lot of my things. . . . I

think," he added, gloomily, "that I'd better hunt about for some water, to put the fire entirely out. I don't want to start a prairie fire, or whatever you call it."

"Do you suppose there is a stream anywhere about?" asked Linda.

"I hope so. If we've got to stay here for the night."

"Then come back to the Ladybug and get a can to fill, in case you do find water. Bring some back to us, if possible, and then we'll give you some supper. Real Mexican food—if you like it." It was Dot who made this offer, and she winked slyly at Linda as she concluded.

The young man wandered off, and the girls turned to their preparations for supper. The food had already been cooked, so they decided to eat it cold.

It was some time before Chase returned with the can of water and the announcement that he had found a stream, and had succeeded in putting out the fire. He sat down gloomily beside the girls, but he made no motion to eat.

"Don't look so sad, Mr. Chase," said Dot. "They'll give you another plane."

"It isn't that," he replied, morosely. "It's

my foolhardiness. When I think of what I did to you, I'd like to shoot myself."

He looked so pathetic, so utterly downcast, that Linda didn't know what to say. But Dot, in her characteristic manner, tried teasing him. Very solemnly she handed him Linda's pistol.

"If you really want to shoot yourself, go off away from us, where you won't clutter up the landscape!"

The young man laughed in spite of himself.

"Snap out of it, Bert!" she commanded, using his first name on purpose. "And have some of this delicious Mexican food. I don't know its name, but it tastes like week-old hash to me."

Smiling again, Chase accepted the paper plate she held out to him.

"Just imagine, Bert," Dot continued, afraid to stop talking lest he become sad again, "that we're here on a picnic, with the autogiro, and this delicious supper. And you're lucky enough to be the young man chosen—out of hundreds of admirers of Miss Linda Carlton! Why, you have no idea how many young men in this country would give their best hats to have your chance!"

Linda flushed at this remark.

“Now, Dot,” she protested. “You’re being silly!”

“I am not. I’ll enumerate them, if you like. There’s Ralph Clavering, and Harriman Smith, and—”

“Hush, Dot!” cried her chum, putting her hand over her mouth. “That’s about enough out of you!”

Chase, who by this time was grinning broadly, bowed in acknowledgment.

“All joking aside,” he said, “I realize what an honor it is. And that’s just why I feel so rotten about doing those two mean things to you, Linda.” He was so in earnest that he did not realize that he had used her first name. “Accusing you of forgery the first time I saw you, and then almost killing you. You, who have never done anything wrong in your whole life!”

“Come now, that’s putting it on a little bit too thick!” remonstrated Dot. “Linda’s not such a saint as that. I remember many a time that she climbed cherry trees that didn’t belong to her, and skinned out of school—”

“That’s enough about me,” interrupted

Linda. "It's getting so dark, I think we ought to make our plans for the night."

"I suppose we have to stay here," remarked Dot, with a sigh.

"Why the sigh?" asked Chase.

"Oh, I don't care for camping out—in Mexico."

"I don't blame you—after being chloroformed," sympathized Chase. "But you don't have to, tonight. For I found a straw-covered shack over near the stream where I got our water. You girls can have that. I'll stay up here, beside the autogiro."

"You have redeemed yourself, Bert!" exclaimed Dot, jumping to her feet, and shaking his hand. "For one night at least, we'll be safe!"

CHAPTER XI

FLIRTING WITH DEATH

THE little Mexican adobe house which Bert Chase had discovered was the funniest Linda and Dot had ever seen. A one-room affair, with a slanting straw-covered roof, and no windows. Only two doors, opening back and front.

“I’d almost rather sleep under the stars,” remarked Linda. “For there are probably all sorts of bugs in the corners and cracks.”

Dot shivered. “Still, bugs are better than bears and snakes, that might come wandering down from those mountains,” she said. “And besides, it would be ungrateful not to use the house after Bert found it.”

“It will be protection from the sun in the morning,” added Linda. “Because this Mexican climate gets pretty hot.”

So, spreading their blankets on the floor and propping the doors open with sticks, they lay

down on their hard bed and fell fast asleep, not to awaken until quite late the following morning.

“Fog again!” yawned Dot, as she finally got up stiffly and walked to the door. “I’m sick of these fogs.”

“It’ll probably clear up soon,” Linda reminded her. “I’ve read that early morning fogs are the common thing in this part of the country.”

“Let’s hunt that stream Bert was talking about, and get a good wash,” suggested Dot. “Before we go back to the autogiro.”

They found it not far from the little house, and although it was shallow and narrow, the water was clear and refreshing. They felt much better as they made their way back to the spot where the Ladybug had landed.

For several minutes they could see nothing because of the fog, and they began to feel worried. Suppose something had happened to Chase or to the autogiro during the night! What a desolate place to be stranded!

Before these dismal thoughts could really take hold of them, they spied the dim outlines

of the Ladybug, shadowy in the fog. She was still there! Their means of escape.

Dot placed her hands at her mouth, and gave a war-whoop for Chase.

“Yo-ho-ho-ho-Bert!” she shouted.

“Yo-ho, girls!” came the reassuring reply. “This way!”

Then they distinguished a fire, and a moment later, came upon him, contentedly cooking a fish.

“Where did you get it?” demanded Dot.

“Caught it. Early this morning,” he replied. “I felt guilty about eating so much of your food last night, so I tried to get a contribution. That stream widens out about a mile below your little house, so I went down and tried my luck.”

“You’re a peach!” exclaimed Dot. “Because all we have left is coffee and that terrible Mexican bread. It’s a wonder they don’t learn how to bake in Mexico.”

“It surely smells good,” observed Linda. “How soon can we eat?”

“As soon as you girls make the coffee. I brought up a fresh supply of water this morning. We’ll boil some of it, to take along with

us for drinking, while we have the chance to do it.”

It turned out to be a delicious as well as a merry meal. While they ate, the fog gradually lifted, bringing a clear, if hot day, for their flight.

“We must be pretty near the coast of the Gulf of California,” said Linda. “So I think perhaps our best plan would be to fly across to the peninsula. I have an idea that girl is going to abandon the Sky Rocket as soon as she can, for it’s pretty conspicuous.”

“What would she do to get away, if she hadn’t a plane?” demanded Dot.

“Hide somewhere, or take a boat for South America perhaps. Now that she and her husband are out of the United States, it would be easy enough for them to book passage on a small steamer—without being noticed.”

“Is your autogiro in good condition?” inquired Chase. “I mean—I didn’t damage it yesterday, did I?”

“No. You know you never touched me. But I’ll look her over before we start. And put in that tank of extra gas I was carrying in the passenger’s cockpit.”

“Perhaps I could help you?” suggested the young man. “I don’t know much about the inside workings of a plane, but maybe two heads are better than one.”

Dot let out a peal of laughter.

“Linda is a graduate airplane mechanic,” she said. “She is the only woman in the country with a mechanic’s license!”

Chase stared in open-mouthed amazement.

“Whew!” he exclaimed. “I do take off my hat to you, Miss Linda Carlton!”

“You’d better!” laughed Dot.

“Oh, don’t be so silly,” put in Linda, anxious to be off. “Let’s all go over to the Ladybug now.”

While Dot put the equipment into the autogiro, Chase filled the gasoline tank and Linda gave the boat a hasty inspection. Apparently everything was ship-shape.

They climbed into the cockpits and Linda started the rotors in motion. It was Chase’s first experience in an autogiro, and he watched her with absorbed interest. The ease with which the Ladybug rose into the air seemed nothing short of miraculous to him, accus-

tomed as he was to the prolonged taxi-ing of a fast plane.

With the aid of her maps and compass, Linda was able to judge their location pretty definitely, and she flew westward to the Gulf of California, aiming to stop first at an airport to make inquiries about the Sky Rocket, and to refuel. They passed over the plateau, and caught glimpses of several Mexican villages, which, however, seemed too small to boast of airports. At last, however, about noon, she spotted a town of some size, with beacon signposts, pointing to an airport. Here she made her landing.

“We’ll be out of luck if they don’t speak English,” remarked Dot.

“Don’t worry about that,” returned Chase. “I can speak Spanish, and they all understand that down here.”

But it wasn’t necessary, for one of the attendants at the field spoke English perfectly.

“Have you seen a yellow biplane?” demanded Dot, as the man came out of the hangar. “A fast plane?”

The attendant nodded.

“Yes,” he replied. “I did. We got a radio

yesterday, telling us to be on the look-out for a stolen plane. I'm pretty sure I saw her yesterday, but she didn't stop here."

"She wouldn't," remarked Dot, bitterly.

"What direction did she take?" asked Linda.

"Straight across the Gulf. Due west."

"Due west for us, then," announced Linda. "Fill up my tanks, for we want to leave with all possible speed."

Inside of ten minutes they were off again, more encouraged than they had been since the beginning of their pursuit. It looked now as if they really might catch those criminals.

In their eagerness to follow hot on the trail, not one of the three fliers even thought of lunch. Later in the day they were to regret this omission sorely.

An hour of flying brought them to the coast, but Linda did not stop. Out over the water she flew, her heart beating rapidly with the expectation of victory ahead.

But in her excitement, she had not realized how wide the Gulf of California was at this southern part. Two hundred miles, at least, if she kept her course straight. She had covered only a little more than half of this, when she

saw to her horror that her main tank was exhausted. Twelve gallons of gas in the emergency supply, and almost a hundred miles to go!

What a fool she had been, not to put an extra tank into the cockpit! To think that after all her experience, she should be endangering three lives by her carelessness! To be forced down in the water! To meet death in a way she had not thought of, since her flight across the Atlantic Ocean!

She slowed down her speed and gazed all about her at the limitless expanse of water beneath them. No land in sight—not even a boat to which she could signal. Parachute jumping would be of no use, and she did not carry life-preservers.

She glanced again at the indicator; conserving gas as well as she could, it was nevertheless rapidly disappearing. Ten minutes more, perhaps—and then a watery grave! She grew panicky, more for her companions than for herself. She would have to tell them of their fate.

Trying to keep her voice from shaking, she called into the speaking-tube:

“We’re out of gas. We have to come down. Be prepared to jump clear of the ship!”

Chase and Dot looked at each other in incredulity. The young man thought Linda was joking, but the girl knew that it was not her chum’s habit to make ghastly jokes. If Linda said danger, she meant it. Desperately Dot reached for the glasses and peered anxiously about them in all directions.

Linda, her lips tight and her heart tense, continued to guide the plane and to watch the indicator. Five minutes more, perhaps—and then—what? The hungry waves, tossing beneath her, seemed to make their greedy answer.

A sudden hysterical cry from Dot sounded above the roar of the motor.

“Land!” she shouted, wildly. “Bank to the right!” And then, fearing that Linda had not heard her, she repeated her message through the speaking-tube.

Although Linda could still see nothing with her naked eye, she did as she was told, thankful that she was high enough in the air to gain considerable distance by gliding. Two minutes passed; the gas ran dry, but now the island

was in sight. By careful manipulation, Linda thought she could make it.

With a series of side-slips, she gradually made her approach, coming nearer and nearer to the land as she descended, until she was actually over it. Then, with a dead-stick landing, so much easier with an autogiro than with an ordinary plane, she slowly came down on the sandy soil of the beach!

“Oh, thank Heaven!” cried Dot, in an ecstasy of relief. “A miracle, if there ever was one.”

Chase said nothing for a moment; he was speechless with admiration.

“Pretty tight squeeze,” admitted Linda, as she wiped the perspiration from her face. “If it hadn’t been for you, Dot, I’d never have seen it.”

Still trembling from their experience, the girls climbed out of the cockpits with Chase’s assistance. At last the young man found words to express his admiration to Linda. But she was too ashamed of her lack of foresight to accept any praise. She was still terribly vexed with herself.

“Now we’ll have to explore,” announced Dot.

“Do you suppose anybody lives on this island?”

“I’m afraid not,” replied Chase. “Or they’d have been here to see us by this time. It looks pretty barren and forsaken to me.”

“No trees! No shade at all!” added Dot.

Nothing, indeed, but a dry underbrush, and the sort of weeds that grow in sandy soil. The little group walked all around the island, and found it to be very small. Probably it was not even shown on most maps, though Linda did recall seeing some dots in the southern part of the Gulf. And of course nobody lived there.

Dismally they came back to the beach where the Ladybug was resting.

“Is there any food left at all?” asked Chase, trying not to appear too eager.

“Not a crumb,” replied Dot. “Though we do still have about a gallon of water.”

“The first thing to do,” he said, “is to climb up on the plane and hoist a signal of distress. So we’ll catch a ship, if one goes past. If you’ll get me something to put . . . ”

He glanced shyly at the girls. As they were both in khaki flying-suits, there was no chance of using a white skirt or petticoat, as he had so often read of, in books about ship-wreck. But

Linda immediately procured a large square of canvas which she kept on hand for repair, and he did the climbing at once.

When he came down again, he produced the fishing-line which he had improvised that morning and set about to try to catch a fish. Linda spent her time inspecting the plane, and Dot went about gathering underbrush for a fire, in case Chase was lucky enough to secure a catch.

Each of the three had taken a deep drink of water, resolutely trying to stay off their hunger by that means.

An hour passed, and another, without any sign of a boat, and the girls began to wonder whether they would have to spend the night on this tiny island, without any food. They were sitting back on the beach, near to the autogiro, talking a little, and searching the waters often with the glasses for the sight of a ship. The sun was already low against the horizon.

"I wonder how far we are from the peninsula," remarked Dot. "Maybe we could swim."

"Not on an empty stomach," returned Linda. "Besides, we must be pretty far. According to my figures . . . Oh, look, Dot!" She jumped gaily to her feet.

“What! A boat?” cried her companion.

“No. Only Bert—with a fish! But it surely does look good.”

“Light your fire, Dot!” the young man called as he approached. “The fish is cleaned—all ready to fry.”

“You’re an ace!” returned the girl, looking admiringly at the young man in his flier’s suit, and his rumpled hair and cheery smile. How different he looked from the first time the girls had seen him—as a stern detective in Von Goss’s office. It didn’t seem possible that they had known him only a few days.

She lighted the fire, and half an hour later they ate their scanty supper. If anyone had ever told them that fish without any bread, or even salt, would taste good, they would not have believed it. But now they found it extremely satisfying.

“I’m going right back again,” said Chase, when they had finished eating. “If I have to fish all night, I’m determined to get something for your breakfast!”

“You—won’t—have—to,” announced Linda, slowly, handing her glasses to Dot. “I’m sure I see a boat!”

CHAPTER XII

THE ENEMY PLANE

THE three young fliers stood on the beach, waiting for the approaching boat in excited suspense. She was nearer now; there was no doubt that she was answering their signal.

It was a large, flat steamboat with wide decks, which were packed with passengers who were peering at the lonely little island, and waving cheerily at the three survivors. It approached rapidly; when it was within calling distance of the island it stopped and let down a life-boat, which two men rowed to the shore.

“Shall we all get aboard?” inquired Dot, turning to Linda.

“I think I’d rather not,” replied Linda. “If they can supply us with some food, I think I’d better stay here. You see, I don’t like to leave the Ladybug alone.”

“What do you suggest, Linda?” asked

Chase, as if he, too, considered her the guide in this situation.

“That you go to the mainland, Bert—or to the peninsula, whichever the boat happens to be headed for—and bring me back some gas.”

“You mean leave you two girls here alone?” he asked. “It’ll mean all night—before I can get back.”

“Yes. Why not? We’ll be safe, unless a shark comes to shore and bites us. But for goodness’ sake, don’t forget us!”

“I’ll never forget you,” replied the young man solemnly.

The life-boat had reached the island by this time, and two men jumped out and leaped to shore.

“This is wonderful of you!” cried Dot. “We certainly are grateful.”

“Glad to do it,” replied one of the men, a big, brawny sailor. “But do tell me what that thing is.” He pointed to the autogiro. “It looks like a plane, but I never seen a plane like that before.”

“It’s an autogiro,” explained Chase. “And we ran out of gas—almost dropped down in the

Gulf . . . So, if you can take me to shore, I'd like to get some and bring it back here."

"Sure," replied the man. "But what about the ladies?"

"We've decided to stay here," replied Dot. "At least, if you can supply us with some food to keep us till tomorrow morning. We're nearly starved."

"Sure," repeated the man, "anything you say!"

Chase and the two sailors climbed into the rowboat and pushed off immediately. Inside of ten minutes they returned, bringing a box of food with them, and a tank of ice-water.

"How much do we owe you?" inquired Linda, taking a bill from her pocket.

"Nothin'!" answered the man. "The Captain says it's a present, with his compliments."

"I think that's awfully good of him," said Dot, lifting the lid of the box and peering hungrily inside. "And it looks like real American food, too. Biscuits—and ham—and eggs!"

"Mexican chickens lay the same kind of eggs that American chickens do," observed Chase, dryly.

"That'll be enough out of you!" retorted

Dot, trying to look scornful, but laughing in spite of herself.

“Be sure to get something to eat for yourself, right away, Bert,” put in Linda.

“We’ll take care of that,” the sailor assured her, as the men returned to the boat.

“And come back soon!” added Dot.

The rowboat went back to the steamer, and the girls remained on the beach watching it, all the while waving and smiling to their rescuers. At last the steamboat pulled off, and disappeared from view; then they returned to their fire and built it up again.

“This is going to be a meal worth eating!” exclaimed Dot, as she unpacked biscuits and butter, ham, eggs, and coffee. “Even oranges and bananas!” she added, hardly able to wait until they should begin to eat.

They sat about their fire talking until long after darkness came on, and the stars appeared in the sky. Both girls felt happy now—only anxious to be after their enemy again.

“I’m so sorry for the delay,” remarked Linda. “More on Mr. Eckert’s account than my own. If I could only get his plane back, I

shouldn't worry so much about that forged check for five thousand dollars."

"It's the idea of what that girl got away with that exasperates me," said Dot. "Making all that money on your name. It's maddening."

"But she's sure to be caught sometime, by the police. And then she'll have to pay up."

"Yes, but I want her caught soon—and by us, if possible."

"Well, tomorrow's a new day," said Linda hopefully. "And you never can tell what will happen. Now—let's get some sleep."

So, wrapping up in their blankets, they lay down in the sand, far inland, lest the tide should rise, and slept until the sun awakened them. A delightfully cool breeze was blowing from the ocean, reminding the girls of pleasant days at the seashore.

"Only it reminds me more of that island off the coast of Georgia," returned Dot, when Linda made this observation.

"It does look something like it. But oh, such different circumstances now. We're not Robinson Crusoes here. We've got everything we want—food, and the Ladybug, and Bert Chase to rescue us."

“Speaking of Bert,” put in Dot, “let’s get a good swim before he gets back.”

They acted upon the suggestion immediately, and enjoyed their dip immensely. What a thrill it gave them to bathe for the first time in the Gulf of California! Almost like going into the Pacific Ocean. But they did not venture out far, or stay long in the water. They wanted to be all ready for Chase when he returned, so that they could be on their pursuit again as quickly as possible.

“I like your boy-friend, Linda,” said Dot, taking up the conversation where they had left it when they went in to bathe. “But it’s nice to have him out of the way for a while.”

“I don’t see why you call him *my* boy-friend,” returned the other girl. “He’s just as much yours.”

“He is not! Haven’t you noticed how he’s always watching you? As if he couldn’t take his eyes from you. Pure devotion, I’d call it.”

Linda laughed and began to run a comb through her wet hair, arranging the ringlets in place. She had a lovely natural wave—a gift which saved her a great deal of time at hair-

dressers'. No matter where she was, or how she was dressed, she always looked pretty.

"I think you're exaggerating, Dot. He's never said anything to make me think he especially likes me."

"All the more credit to him! But just the same, I'll bet Ralph Claverling wouldn't feel any too easy about him."

Suddenly Linda sighed.

"What's the matter?" demanded Dot. "That wasn't a sigh of hunger!"

"No, it wasn't. The mention of Ralph made me feel just a little bit homesick. Not for him especially—but for the whole crowd, and for Aunt Emily and Daddy. We've only been gone about ten days, but it seems ages and ages!"

"Because so much has happened."

"Yes, and because we have been in such strange places. And the days have been long too."

"What do you suppose everybody is doing by now?" inquired Dot.

"Most of them are at college, I suppose. Sue Emery and Sara Wheeler are rooming together. And Jim and Ralph both must have gone back. I don't know about Harriman

Smith. The last letter I had from him, he said he wasn't sure whether he'd have enough money."

"He's a nice boy," was Dot's comment.

"One of the best," replied Linda, with unusual enthusiasm for her. "But Dot," she continued, as they began to make their fire for breakfast, "don't you regret not going to college?"

"No, not a bit. I get lots more thrills battling about the country on adventures with you. If I were at college, and learned that you were suddenly off to California—or to the North Pole, I'd be absolutely sick with jealousy. I'd probably drop everything and go. And then, of course, college would drop me."

"You're an old peach, Dot!" exclaimed Linda, giving her chum a hug. "But some day I 'spose I'll have to lose you, as I did Lou. Jim'll decide that he just won't wait any longer, and you'll be going up the aisle to the tune of Lohengrin!"

Dot dimpled, but shook her head.

"You needn't worry about that, Linda," she said. "But if the time ever comes, I'll tell you what you can do: Get married yourself!"

And then you'll have a chum who won't ever desert you!"

"I'm not so sure about that—these days . . . Now, shall we have our breakfast?"

"I'm all for it," agreed Dot, sitting down to the pleasant meal they had just cooked.

The boat bringing Chase with the gasoline did not arrive until eleven o'clock. It took some little time to get the tanks of gasoline into shore, for the men dared load only one at a time on the rowboat. And Chase had brought three.

"Greetings!" he called to the girls, as the small boat approached. "You're still alive? Nothing happened during the night?"

Dot laughed merrily.

"You sound like Linda's aunt, Bert. She always expects the worst."

"Well, I didn't really think there was anything much you girls couldn't conquer. Only something like a big tide, that would sweep the whole island away."

He filled the empty tanks of the antogiro, and put the other two cans into the passenger's cockpit. As soon as the rowboat pulled off, the young man turned excitedly to the girls.

“I’ve got hot news!” he announced. “A yellow biplane was sighted yesterday, flying with all possible speed towards the Pacific Ocean. I got that from Los Angeles headquarters last night.”

Linda’s eyes sparkled with excitement.

“We’ll be right after them,” she said. “Oh, if we’re only not too late!”

“It’s a peach of a day,” commented Dot. “If it is hot.”

“Heat doesn’t bother me,” returned Linda, climbing into the cockpit, and setting the rotors in motion. “Get in—if you’re coming with me!”

Linda gave her the gun, and the Ladybug left the beach a minute or so later, soaring triumphantly into the skies.

“We’re going to fly high, now!” shouted Linda. “And we’re going to make speed!”

The outlines of the island faded and disappeared from their sight; even the water was lost to their view. The Ladybug flew as if she were on a test flight, to prove her ability to take part in any kind of service. Mile after mile disappeared as Linda watched her instruments and her map closely, for now she could

figure just about how far she had to go to reach the coast of the peninsula. All the while Dot scanned the air with the glasses, looking for a flash of yellow in the sky.

“We are over an airport town now,” Linda announced about one o’clock. “Shall we come down for lunch?”

“No! No!” returned her companions. “We’ll dig out something from the box, and eat as we go. On to the coast!”

They continued onward for an hour or so, landing once to refuel from an extra tank of gas. Now Linda dipped lower, anxious to watch the landscape, for she knew that she must be very near to the Pacific Ocean. She identified the roofs of a village—a little seaport town, probably—and yes—there was the ocean beyond!

“I’d go south for a while, Linda!” Chase advised. “The report was that the Sky Rocket was headed southwest.”

So Linda banked and directed her course along the coast to the southward. Flying low, and watching the ground for an airport.

From the air they were able to identify scattered seaside huts, and even fishing boats out

on the ocean. But no town of any size, and no sign of an airport.

"We ought to land and make inquiries," Linda was thinking to herself, when Dot suddenly let out a piercing scream. Terrified, Linda looked all about her, thinking they must be rushing headlong into some awful peril.

"I see the plane!" Dot cried, frantically. "Over there on the beach—to the left!"

Linda peered out to the side her chum indicated, but she could distinguish nothing but a blurred outline of green.

"The Sky Rocket!" screamed Dot. "Bank to the left!"

Though she still failed to see it with her naked eye, Linda's heart beat rapidly with the thrill of success, and she took the direction Dot indicated. She dipped lower, and banked to the left, approaching the spot slowly. And then, sure enough, she saw it for herself. The Sky Rocket!

The beach was wide and the plane stood erect, as if all ready for a take-off. Suppose it sailed off this moment! Before Linda could get to it! The Sky Rocket was bigger, faster,

newer than the Ladybug—wouldn't it be sure to get away in a race?

While these thoughts were running through her head, she kept her eyes glued upon the plane, approaching it cautiously. Nearer and nearer she came—but still the Sky Rocket did not move. What was Sprague's game now? Would he wait for her to land, and shoot from under cover?

Down—down the Ladybug came. To death? Or at least a struggle? Reaching instinctively for her revolver, Linda landed the autogiro on the beach, about a hundred yards from the enemy plane . . . And—waited!

CHAPTER XIII

HOT ON THE TRAIL

CHASE, his hand on his revolver, climbed out of the autogiro and slipped cautiously around the side. He kept his eyes riveted on the Sky Rocket, but there was no movement whatsoever.

“They’re probably hiding,” he whispered, as the noise of the rotors died out. “You girls stay right here, and I’ll creep up on them.”

Dot and Linda did as they were told. In tense silence they watched the young man advance nearer and nearer to the Sky Rocket, expecting every moment to hear a shot ring out from the underbrush that grew along the beach.

It was a deserted spot; there were no cottages or boathouses about. The only sound was the breaking of the waves, with monotonous regularity, upon the shore.

Chase got nearer and nearer; he actually

came up to the yellow plane, and peered all around it. Still there was no sign of human life anywhere. He looked into the cockpit; then he sauntered towards the scattered bushes on the beach, examining them with his glasses. And still nothing happened.

Unable to bear the suspense any longer, the girls came out from behind the Ladybug and started to advance towards the Sky Rocket. At the same time Chase, satisfied that the enemy was nowhere about, proceeded slowly back to meet them.

“We’re too late again,” he observed, gloomily. “They’ve abandoned it, there’s no doubt of that. Evidently got scared and decided to leave it.”

Running up to the plane, Linda began to examine it eagerly.

“It seems to be in good condition,” she said. “And that certainly is a lucky break. If I couldn’t get both, I’d rather have the plane than the girl!”

Chase regarded her in amazement.

“But she has your money!” was his comment.

“I know. But I care more about Mr. Eck-

ert's plane—it's worth a whole lot more than five thousand dollars. And he was such a good sport to lend it to me. I can just imagine how dreadfully he'd feel, if he thought he'd never see it again. I know how I felt when I lost the Ladybug."

"But where do you suppose they have gone?" asked Dot. "The Spragues, I mean."

Linda dropped down to a sitting position on the sand and fished in her pocket for a map.

"They must have taken a boat from somewhere near here," she said. "So if we can find out where we are, and the nearest seaport town, we might be able to catch them before they sail."

"We're pretty far south on this peninsula," put in Chase, looking over Linda's shoulder at the map.

"Yes, I think so . . . You know what I believe would be best, Bert? If the Sky Rocket is in good condition—we'll look her over in a minute and find out—one of us could fly her south along the coast, and another take the Ladybug north. In that way we ought to pick up news of our honeymooners pretty quickly."

“Good idea!” returned Chase, immediately.

“Which plane do you want, Linda?”

“I think I’d rather have the Sky Rocket,” returned the girl. “If you can manage the Ladybug. Because if I should find out that the Spragues have sailed somewhere in a boat, I might like to pursue them. And the Sky Rocket can go so much faster, and carry enough gas for a trip across the United States.”

“It’s all one to me,” agreed Chase. “If you’ll trust me with the Ladybug.”

“Certainly,” Linda assured him. “Now I think I’ll go look the Sky Rocket over, and tighten some of those wires that I see out of ‘stream-line’. That makes a lot of difference, you know.”

Linda finished her job in less than an hour, and after they had eaten the remainder of their food supply, she gave Chase a few instructions about flying the autogiro. Satisfied that he knew how to manage it, the girls insisted that he take off first, flying back north along the sea-coast.

“And when you’re through, you can park the Ladybug at the Los Angeles airport,” concluded Linda. “I’ll pick her up there, after the

girl has been caught—by us, or somebody else.”

She and Dot stood watching the young man take off and soar into the air, until he was finally lost to sight. Once again they were alone, but with more hope of success than they had had before. Now both planes had been regained, and they had the Sky Rocket to rely on. They felt, with it, that they had the world—or better still, the air—at their command.

“There must be a seaport pretty near here,” said Linda, as she and Dot climbed into the powerful yellow plane. “If the Spragues haven’t left from there, they at least ought to be able to find out by wire what vessels have left the coast.”

She flew straight down to Cape San Lucas, a seaport town, which boasted of a sizable airport. It was terribly hot here, when she brought the plane to the ground; the heat seemed to rise in waves to hit them in the face as the girls climbed out of the cockpits. For the airport was located behind the town, and that morning no ocean breezes brought cooling refreshment to landward.

It was a large airport, and it kept attendants who could speak all the principal languages.

The man who came forward, a dark Mexican, surprised the girls by speaking perfect English.

Briefly Linda told him the facts of her story—about the stolen planes, which had since been regained, and the forged check for five thousand dollars. But she said nothing about the part in the talking-picture, or of the girl's having taken her name. There was no reason, she felt, for emphasizing that point or drawing publicity to herself.

"So we think this couple have sailed," she concluded. "Though under what name, we don't know. Probably neither Sprague nor Bower, but something else, to fool us, and throw the police off the track. Our first desire is to find out what big vessels have left this vicinity today or yesterday."

"I'll get in touch with the docks immediately," the man assured her. "Though I think I can tell you myself. A vessel named the 'Mona' left here yesterday for Hawaii. There isn't another until day after tomorrow, which sails for South America."

Linda's eyes shone with excitement.

"Hawaii!" she exclaimed. "I always did want to fly the Pacific!"

“You wouldn’t try it!” he cried, in horror.

“Why not?” she demanded. “It’s only a matter of about two thousand miles—less than a non-stop flight across the United States. And I have a marvellous plane.”

“You mean—this?” he asked, pointing to the Sky Rocket.

“Yes. She’s a marvel, even if she has only one motor. She can make a hundred and fifty miles an hour, and is equipped with all the newest inventions and improvements.”

“I can see that . . . But the danger—in any kind of plane,” he remonstrated. “No woman has ever attempted it, and plenty of airmen have found a watery grave in the Pacific.”

“Well, some woman has to be first,” returned Linda. “I’ll think about it, anyway. In the meanwhile, I think I’ll go down to have a talk with the men at the docks. . . . By the way, have you an expert mechanic?”

“The very best!”

“Then please have him give the Sky Rocket a thorough inspection. Doubly thorough, for tell him what I am contemplating. And have him take a look at the wireless that is already installed. And fill her up with gas and oil.”

“O. K.,” agreed the man, shaking his head as if he thought Linda were crazy.

“Oh, yes—and could you get me a rubber life-boat?” she inquired.

“At considerable cost.”

“Well, get me one if you can, and have it put in,” said Linda, as if she were ordering an ice-cream soda.

“Then you really are serious about going?” asked the man, unable to believe she meant what she was saying.

“If I find good reason to think that couple sailed for Hawaii,” she replied. “But not if I don’t. It isn’t a stunt, you see.”

The girls left immediately in a taxicab for the dock. Here they saw numerous small boats and yachts, and it occurred to Linda to wonder whether the missing couple might not have gone off in a pleasure boat. But after all, they couldn’t get far in the Pacific in a yacht, unless it were one specially built for the purpose, and the idea seemed improbable.

They made their inquiries about the couple of a sailor.

“Yes, there were several young couples among the passengers that left for Hawaii yes—

terday," he informed them. "About thirty passengers, all told."

"But did one of the young couples look like honeymooners?" demanded Dot.

"Can't say as I noticed. But you can look at the list of passengers in the office. That ought to tell you."

He led the girls through an open door, where they found the book on the desk with the name of the boat, the "Mona," and the list. But, as they had expected, neither the name of Bower nor of Sprague occurred.

"If that girl were using her own maiden name, we shouldn't even know what it was," remarked Dot, gloomily.

"True," admitted Linda, thinking how strange it was that once again they were involved in complications with a nameless girl. But, unlike poor little Helen Tower, who had been nameless because of a cruel accident wherein she lost her memory, this girl was deliberately, criminally, nameless.

"Were there any couples in flying costumes?" asked Dot, thinking perhaps that if the Spragues had hiked from the plane, and

speed were their object, they wouldn't have had time to change.

But such a course would have been too obvious, and would have given them away immediately. As she expected, the sailor shook his head to the question.

"Any with hand-luggage?" suggested Linda.

"Yeah. A couple of couples."

"Now we're getting there! Can you describe them?"

"Can't say as I could. Didn't look at 'em, to tell you the truth. Only I do recollect our baggage man sayin' he was gipped out of two tips, so these two guys must of carried their bags themselves."

"Let's go see him," suggested Dot.

"He's a Mexican. Don't speak English. But maybe I can explain to him what you want."

They walked about the dock until they found a greasy-looking man who was sprawled on a truck-van, smoking a pipe. The sailor explained what the girls wanted, and the man sat up and stared at them.

Linda could hardly restrain a shudder. She thought that she wouldn't care about meeting this man alone in the dark, or in the desert.

But he seemed pleasant enough. And, to their delight, he gave them the information they wanted. Pointing abruptly at Linda, he told the sailor in Mexican that one woman looked like that girl!

Before the latter had even interpreted his meaning, Linda and Dot had jumped to the correct conclusion and were wild with excitement. Nothing could keep them back now, short of a cyclone. If the weather held like this on the morrow, they would be on their way to Hawaii!

"That settles it!" announced Linda. Then, turning to the sailor, she inquired the exact destination of the "Mona."

"Honolulu," was the reply.

"Then I'll send a wireless there now," she said, and proceeded to write out a message.

"Hold all passengers of the 'Mona' for identification at Honolulu dock. Two criminals aboard. . . . Signed, Linda Carlton."

"The Captain ought to pick up that message, too," she remarked, turning to Dot as soon as the words had been sent. "And the thing for us to do now, is to make sure that we beat that boat to Honolulu!"

Realizing their need for rest and food, the

girls went back to their taxi and directed the driver to take them to the best hotel the seaport afforded. Here they engaged a room for the night and proceeded to make themselves comfortable. After they had their baths, they stretched out on the bed in their room, shaded and darkened by awnings from the hot sun, and began to discuss the proposition seriously. They realized now how suddenly they had plunged headlong into what really might be the experience of a lifetime—an undertaking that took most fliers months and months to prepare for.

“Do you think we ought to go, Dot?” asked Linda, over-awed for the first time at the dangers of the project, when she considered them for somebody besides herself.

“I’m dying to go!” cried the other girl, her eyes sparkling with anticipation. “There’s only one thing that might hold me back.”

“What’s that? You mean consideration for your parents?”

“No. They’d be willing to let me do anything you considered safe. It’s just that if I didn’t go with you, you could take a more experienced flier in my place—or a mechanic or a

navigator. And that would be better and safer for you."

"Nonsense!" laughed Linda. "I can do those things, and if anything goes wrong, you can take the controls. You certainly fly well—I'd trust you a lot farther than a good many boys I know—like Ralph Clavering, for instance. You're air-minded—you have air sense, to put it another way—and you never get rattled. You can take charge if I want to rest—though it isn't nearly so far as Paris, and I flew that alone."

"That's true," agreed Dot. "It isn't even as far as if we were taking off from Los Angeles." She was pleased, more than she could say, at her chum's praise, for Linda Carlton never said anything she didn't mean.

"Yes, we're a lot farther south than Los Angeles—almost in a direct line westward."

"Are you going to tell your Aunt Emily?" inquired Dot, after a moment of silence.

"No, I think not. I don't believe I'll tell anybody except the people at this airport. Then, if anything goes wrong, we shan't have a lot of unpleasant publicity. Besides, it's all the better for our cause to keep it a secret."

It's not an aviation feat this time, like flying the Atlantic. The main object is to catch those two criminals."

"Then we won't call Spring City on the telephone?"

"No. Let's send wires, assuring our families of our safety, and telling them not to expect us home for several days. That will put their minds at rest, and won't disclose anything."

"What about food?"

"Enough for a day. I figure that if we start before dawn tomorrow, we ought to land early in the morning of the following day. So, while I am mapping out our course, you can go visit the chef and see about packing sandwiches and fruit and coffee. That ought to be enough. And we'll eat an early breakfast before we start."

"What are the predictions for weather?"

"Favorable and warm."

"It doesn't seem possible that we're going so soon," observed Dot.

"It's the way I like to do things," returned Linda. "With a snap—and we're off! Let's have an early supper, about six o'clock, and get

in bed by nine. And leave a call for three o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Three o'clock! The time lots of young people are getting home from dances!"

"Well, this is going to be more thrilling than any dance you ever attended, Dot Crowley!"

"It's going to be the thrill of a lifetime!"

"I hope it is. I really believe it will end happily, or I shouldn't be taking you along, for I am the one who's responsible. The Sky Rocket can carry a good load, and we're both so light that I can easily put in a big extra tank of gas for emergency, in case we get off our course."

"And if that runs out, or anything else happens, we'll go to sea in a rubber life-boat!"

"I hope we shan't have to," said Linda. . . .
"But now we really must get to work. I'm going to get out my maps. It'll be a pretty hard job to locate those little islands in that vast expanse of ocean."

"If we only don't run into a fog!" commented Dot.

"But if we do, there's the good old earth-inductor compass to guide us. And besides, our course lies pretty straight westward."

For the next few hours the girls scarcely exchanged a word, so busily were they employed upon their duties. Dot sent the wires and interviewed the chef of the hotel, and Linda pored over maps and diagrams, running her fingers through her hair, marking her course with her pencil. At six o'clock she telephoned to the airport with final instructions. Then, dressed as they were, for all their dresses were still at the Los Angeles hotel, they went down to dinner.

The dining-room was warm in spite of the fans, and it seemed exactly like midsummer to the girls, although it really was October by the calendar. But San Lucas was much farther south than Spring City, Ohio.

There were not many people in the dining-room, for it was an early hour to dine. How thankful the girls were that they were not at the Ambassador, crowded as it always was with motion-picture people and visitors! They ate their meal slowly, then retired to their room to work quietly until bed-time.

And so, at nine o'clock they prepared to go to sleep, conscious that their next night would probably be spent on the ocean—an adventure

which would either end in disaster, or would make a story that would go down in history, of the first young women to fly the Pacific Ocean.

Only time could answer that question!

CHAPTER XIV

OVER THE PACIFIC

THE gray dawn of early morning found Linda and Dot at the airport of Cape San Lucas, all ready to take off on their momentous journey. More than two thousand miles over the biggest ocean in the world, without a single stop!

The Sky Rocket was already on the runway, in perfect condition for the trip. Her high-powered Wright engine was performing as excellently as an expensive watch; her instruments were in tune, her tanks filled. The wireless had been tested, and found to be working, and the rubber life-boat which Linda had ordered was tucked away in the plane.

“What are the weather predictions for this morning?” Linda inquired of the mechanic, as Dot put the lunch into the cockpit.

“Good for at least twenty-four hours,” he replied. “But that’s not the only danger, Miss

Carlton." He shook his head ominously. "This is sure suicide," he predicted.

"Why?" demanded Dot. "Isn't the motor in perfect condition? There isn't anything wrong, is there?"

"No. She's O.K. Oiled her up a bit, and tightened a few screws. It isn't that. But you'll run into a typhoon, or lose your way—"

"It's a pretty straight course," said Linda. "We're on the Tropic of Cancer now, and Hawaii is just a little below it. It looks like pretty easy navigating to me."

"You're welcome to it. And—happy landing!"

Linda and Dot lost no time in getting started. Five minutes later the Sky Rocket was triumphantly rising into the air, heading straight towards the ocean. Over the weeds and rough seashore growth on the beach, past the waves breaking on the shore of the Pacific! The sun had not yet risen, but it was light enough to see where they were going. On they flew; now the waves seemed higher, but the air was calm.

There was little wind, so Linda continued to fly low, so that they could make use of the cushion of air on top of the water. And it was

thrilling to watch the ocean—more exciting than seeing it from the deck of a boat.

“It does seem calmer than the Atlantic,” observed Dot, in a loud tone. Seated side by side as they were in the companion cockpit, it was not necessary to use the speaking-tube, and for this advantage they were grateful. “They say that’s why it was called the ‘Pacific.’ ”

“It’s beautiful, anyway,” returned Linda, admiringly.

On and on they flew, ever westward, as the sun rose in its full glory behind them. Soon the land was lost to view; there were no vessels in sight—only limitless sky and ocean, and two girls alone in that vast, empty universe. But both girls were in high spirits; neither was the least bit afraid.

Climbing a little higher, Linda opened her throttle to its maximum, and found themselves travelling at a speed of a hundred and fifty miles an hour. The girls laughed and sang at the joy of the exhilarating motion, but they did not attempt to talk. There was so much to think about—the fun of the flight, and the triumph of landing in Hawaii, ahead of that boat, the “Mona.” Oh, if they only made it!

Water everywhere—and the sky overhead. Noontime came, with the sun right above them, and the girls realized that it had been a long time since they had eaten. Dot made a dive for the coffee and sandwiches, divided off as they were in portions for lunch and supper and breakfast, and both girls ate ravenously. When they had finished she insisted that Linda take a rest.

With a yawn and a stretch, Linda willingly complied, and gave the controls over to the other girl. It would afford her not only an opportunity to relax, but a chance to study the maps as well.

“We’ve covered eight hundred miles already,” she shouted in Dot’s ear. “And we’re sticking straight to our course.”

“How’s the gas holding out?” returned her companion.

“Fine. I think we’ll have some left over, at this rate. . . . Now Dot, if you’re all right, I think I’ll take forty winks. Even that blazing sun doesn’t seem to keep me from being sleepy.”

The other girl nodded, and Linda slipped off to sleep. Even the bumps in the air seemed to

have no effect upon her slumbers; for an hour perhaps, she slept soundly, while Dot continued on the flight. Then, all of a sudden she was abruptly awakened by a terrified cry from her companion. The plane was dropping—it seemed to be diving right into the ocean—into the very jaws of death!

For one brief moment Linda thought of the life-boat, but that did not seem feasible now. Instinctively she grabbed the stick, and pulled it back sharply. The Sky Rocket wobbled almost on the surface of the water, and at that very moment a hideous, terrifying shark poked its head above the surface!

For one awful second death stared them in the face. Not the easy death of drowning, but a horrible torturing agony at the jaws of a ferocious fish. The plane seemed to hover uncertainly for a moment; then with a sudden lightning speed it gathered control and started to climb upward—to safety!

Linda let out a gasp of relief, and Dot sobbed in contrition as the Sky Rocket soared into the air.

“I don’t know how I could have done it,” wailed Dot. “All of a sudden, it seemed as if

we were headed straight for the ocean, and nothing could stop us. If you hadn't taken hold that very instant, we'd have been killed."

"It was a lucky escape," returned Linda. "And from now on we'll make it a point to fly higher, even if we can't use the wind to such advantage, as we could right over the water."

The afternoon passed, with the motor still functioning perfectly. The wind increased somewhat, but not enough to disturb Linda greatly. She was continuing to fly high, for she didn't want to run any risk of hitting that deep, terrifying ocean again. A little before sunset they sighted a ship.

"I'm going a little lower," she shouted to Dot. "Get your glasses. We'll see whether that's the 'Mona.'"

"It is!" exclaimed Dot, a few minutes later. "I suppose we're too far south to meet the regular Los Angeles-Hawaii lines. But we must be following about the same course as the 'Mona.'"

"Keep a watch-out for the girl-friend!" advised Linda.

Down they glided, keeping the ship in sight until they were about a hundred feet over the

water. It was a small boat—not nearly so large as the regular San Francisco-Hawaii line; and they could see the people hurrying to the deck, peering through their glasses, and waving and shouting in greeting. Dot, too, did her share of the searching.

“I don’t see them,” she said.

Linda looked intently, but she could not distinguish the passengers’ faces. However, she did not think it was likely that Sprague or his wife would be waving to them. They would surely recognize the plane.

“Probably they’ve been keeping off the decks,” she said. “Hiding, as much as possible, without arousing suspicion.”

“Maybe the girl’s seasick,” observed Dot. “I only hope she doesn’t pass out and get buried at sea, before we ever have a look at her, or a chance to collect that five thousand,” remarked Dot.

Linda regained her height, and sped onward, determined to get to Hawaii well in advance of the boat, and to lie in wait for the criminals. The blood was rushing through her veins, and she was thrilled with the chase, but she resolutely kept calm. The worst of the trip—the

black night—was ahead of her, and she needed every ounce she had of energy and nerve.

The plane was still doing well over a hundred miles an hour, and going forward with mighty gains, eating up the miles. The sun set and once again the girls ate some sandwiches and drank more coffee.

“I’m almost afraid to offer to take the controls and let you rest,” said Dot, humbly. “After the way I fell down before.”

“It was the Sky Rocket that did the falling,” laughed Linda. “But I guess that wouldn’t happen again. You’ll stay up high, I’m thinking.”

“You’ll trust me again?”

“Certainly, Dot. Don’t be so foolish. Besides, I want to do a little calculating.”

Relaxing back in her seat, Linda consulted her maps and her sextant, when suddenly she heard a queer noise. The motor was knocking in a strange, ominous way that almost made the girls’ hearts stop beating. Was it going dead? Panic-stricken, Dot looked down on the ocean, hoping that she could see the “Mona,” or some other ship that might rescue them, and Linda’s thoughts turned to the wireless.

The tapping was growing worse; the engine seemed to be dying. Linda racked her brain for a reason; surely the gas hadn't given out. Telling Dot to keep on guiding the plane, she examined the feed-valve. And here she located the trouble!

A broad smile of relief spread over her face. "I can fix that, easily," she assured her companion. "Just hang on for a couple of minutes."

She was as good as her word; soon the knocking ceased, and the engine was running as smoothly as when the Sky Rocket left Cape San Lucas. And Linda herself was back at the controls, urging Dot to avail herself of a nap while she had the chance.

It was entirely dark now, and the stars were shining in the sky, and reflected in the ocean, making a beautiful picture for the girls as they flew on. Phosphorescent lights, too, played through the water, reminding Linda of the dangerous life beneath.

Towards ten o'clock, while Dot was taking her nap, they had one more terrifying experience. Suddenly, for no reason at all, they started to fall. Yet the engine was not dead,

nor was their motion slow enough for a stall. There was only one explanation, of course: an air-pocket. Down, down they came, like an elevator whose cords have been broken. Dot awakened up with a scream and the beads of perspiration stood out on Linda's forehead, for she believed that this time the sea was really about to swallow them.

But she had been flying high, and this proved to be her salvation. She tried banking the plane, first on one side and then on the other, breaking the fall, but making both herself and Dot dizzy with the sickening motion. Her head swam; she hardly knew what she was doing, and there was the black water beneath them. But at last a current of air swept under the wings, assuring her that she was out of danger once more. Making a sharp turn away from the air-pocket, she found her plane responding to the stick as she started to climb back again to the height she had lost.

The girls breathed freely again, and Dot, now wide awake, produced coffee from the thermos bottle, for they felt in need of a stimulant. But, as the plane flew fearlessly on, and the flight again became monotonous, Dot fell asleep once

more, and Linda continued, waking and watchful.

She watched the stars fade gradually from the sky, and the first gray light play over the sea. Tensely alert, she glanced eagerly at her speedometer. If her calculations were correct, there were only three hundred miles more to go!

It was considerably lighter when Dot finally opened her eyes.

“Fine companion I am!” she exclaimed, in shame. “To go to sleep like that. Leaving you as lonely as you were on your Atlantic flight!”

Linda reached over and touched her hand affectionately.

“Don’t you believe it, Dot!” she said. “It makes a big difference, having you here . . . And if you’re awake now, I’d like to have you take control. I want to do some figuring. Now that we’re getting so near, I want to locate the islands. Suppose we’d miss them, after coming all this distance!”

“Suppose we would!” repeated Dot. “And never realize it till we landed on the coast of Australia!”

“We’d know it before then. Our gas would

give out somewhere in the middle of the ocean.”

“Well, we’re not going to miss them!”

It was, as Linda said, one of the most difficult parts of the flight, to locate those tiny dots of islands in the vast expanse of ocean. But Linda was a good navigator, and she made her calculations correctly. They were, she discovered, only about fifty miles off their course—an error which was easily remedied, since their gas supply was adequate.

“A hundred miles more!” she announced, when she finally resumed control. “Now we can watch for the sea-gulls!”

Nearer and nearer to their destination they came. Now Dot spied some fishing craft with her glasses, and that fact told her that the shore must be near. Her excitement was so intense that she could hardly sit still. The end of her first ocean flight! Her first landing from over the water!

“We’re coming!” she shouted, in wild exultation.

Linda was almost equally thrilled, although her pulse was calmer. It had been less terrifying, less difficult, less nerve-racking than the

solitary, long flight over the Atlantic. But she was nevertheless excited.

Now the cliffs rose from the ocean, and the waves broke against the shore, showing their white-caps. And, as if to stage a dramatic arrival, the sun rose in all its glory, shedding its beams over the land and water.

The green island of Molokai was beneath them!

But this was not their destination, and Linda pressed on.

“Aren’t you going to land?” cried Dot, in disappointment.

“No,” returned Linda. “We are making for the island of Oahu. I must come down in Honolulu.”

On they flew, past Molokai, directing their course southwest, over the indigo waters of the Pacific, now so beautiful in the sunlight, then swinging north towards the capital city of the Hawaiian Islands. Now they saw speed boats and launches on the waves; they passed the great Diamond Head, and Waikiki beach, and hovered at last over the Rogers Airport on the coast.

“Honolulu!” cried Linda, joyously. “We are here!”

As the girls looked beneath them, it seemed for a moment as if the airport were a bed of flowers. Garlands of leis and gardenias filled the air with a strange and wonderful fragrance. Then, as Linda dropped lower, she realized that these flowers were all in the arms of people standing about the ground. People of every race and color.

“Who are all those people?” demanded Dot. “Do you suppose there’s been an accident?”

“Oh, I hope not!” replied Linda. “I’ll keep on flying over the field until they scatter. I mustn’t hurt anybody.” She brought the Sky Rocket lower, and gave a signal that she wanted to land.

But already policemen were busily pushing the crowd back, making a clear runway for the plane. When Linda thought it was safe, she gracefully glided to the ground.

Even above the noise of the engine, the girls heard the wild shouts of the multitude.

“Hello, Linda Carlton! Hello, Dot Crowley!” seemed to rise from every direction, and flowers

were strewn in their path. "Welcome to Oahu!"

The girls stared at each other a moment in consternation, not understanding how these people could possibly be informed of their names. But only a moment, for the crowd rushed in, and it took all the policemen's efforts to hold them in check. A small and select group of half a dozen or so were admitted close to the plane.

From this group, a couple of young fliers stepped forward and lifted the girls right out of the cockpit.

"Congratulations to the first girls to cross the Pacific!" they cried, as they put garlands of leis around their necks. Then, with Linda and Dot on their shoulders, high over the heads of the crowd, the boys carried them to a waiting car.

"Aloha!" shouted everyone as they passed. "To our heroines of the air!"

CHAPTER XV

THE ISLAND OF OAHU

“BUT how did you know about us?” gasped Dot, as she found herself miraculously seated in a shining, low car at the edge of the flying field. “We didn’t tell anybody about it.”

Both the young men grinned broadly.

“A special late edition came out last night with the announcement,” explained one of the boys. “A Los Angeles paper. And every newspaper in the United States and Hawaii will run the story this morning. Besides, a ship you flew over yesterday sent a radio that you had been sighted!”

The car moved slowly through the space blocked off by the policemen, and Linda and Dot smiled and waved to the crowd as they passed.

“Where are we going now?” asked Linda.

“To the Governor’s mansion. There’s a big breakfast waiting for you. Then there will be

a reception tonight. Did you know that you will receive an award of ten thousand dollars, to be shared between you?"

Linda and Dot looked at each other in amazement. They had undertaken the flight with no thought of glory or reward, and they were winning applause from the whole world. It was nothing short of miraculous!

But what would their own relatives think? Miss Carlton, and Mr. and Mrs. Crowley—and Linda's father, who hadn't even been informed of the project? Was it too late now to send them telegrams?

"We each get five thousand dollars?" repeated Dot, incredulously. "But why? Who is giving it?"

"A wealthy woman in Honolulu promised that amount some time ago to the first woman to fly to Hawaii from the coast of America. The only point she stipulated was that there was to be no man in the plane. So, if two girls made the flight, she said she would divide the prize."

"So you'll get the five thousand back that you lost, Linda!" exclaimed Dot. "Now you won't have to catch that girl."

"But I'm going to catch her," Linda insisted.

“Not for the money, especially, but because I’ve made up my mind to do it.”

The automobile threaded its way through the streets of Honolulu, on to the Governor’s mansion. Here the girls were received with the greatest cordiality by the chief executive’s wife. A lovely breakfast, to which all the important aviators of the island were invited, was served on the wide veranda, and a suite of rooms had been set aside for the girls’ visit.

“I suppose you will want to take a nap first,” said their charming hostess. “Then, after you have rested, perhaps you would like to go down to our beach and bathe.”

“We’d love it!” cried Dot, eagerly. “Think of the thrill of going in bathing in October!”

“Then this evening,” continued the older woman, “is the banquet, followed by a reception in your honor at the hotel. And Mrs. Dinwitty, the donor of the award, will present you with your checks.”

“It’s all just too wonderful!” exclaimed Dot. “But what shall we do for clothes? We can’t attend receptions in flying-suits!”

“I’ll see that they are provided,” promised the other. “We have marvellous shops in our

city, and now that I know your sizes, it will be easy enough to order a supply.”

As soon as she had left them, Linda went to the telephone in her room.

“I must call the police before we go to sleep,” she said to Dot. “We might miss our criminals.”

The reply, however, was reassuring.

“The ‘Mona’ doesn’t dock till noon tomorrow,” an official assured her. “And we have detailed men to help you. We got in touch with the Los Angeles police after we got your wireless, and we made out a warrant for the arrest of the girl. We’ll call you when the ship docks.”

Reassured now, and at ease for the rest of the day, the girls slept all morning in the beautiful bedroom set aside for their visit, and after luncheon they were driven to the famous Waikiki beach, and lay on the sand and later rode the waves of the Pacific on the long, narrow boards which they had so often seen pictured in the movies. There was so much to do and see and enjoy that they wished that they might spend at least a month in this Paradise of the Pacific, as the Hawaiian Islands are so often called.

“It’s hard to think of crime and criminals in a spot like this,” remarked Linda, as she lay on the sand and gazed at the deep blue sky above her. “I purposely haven’t mentioned them to our hostess—because I didn’t want to spoil things. Today has been so perfect.”

And perfect it continued to be, until the girls finally closed their eyes in sleep that night. The dinner and the reception were gorgeous affairs, yet the kindness of the Governor and his wife prevented them from becoming stilted and formal. Even Linda felt no embarrassment when she was called out and presented with the check. For Dot was at her side, equal to the occasion with a clever little speech of acceptance and thanks.

Excitement had kept the girls going during the first day, but the next morning reaction set in and they felt as if they wanted to sleep forever. Their thoughtful hostess, realizing just what they had been through, decided not to have them awakened. Telegrams and flowers began to arrive, but she saw no need of disturbing Linda and Dot. She did not know that they were counting on meeting the ship that was scheduled to dock at noon.

At last, however, Linda opened her eyes and reached for her wrist-watch that lay on the tiny table between her bed and Dot's. It said twenty minutes after twelve!

She picked it up and examined it closely, unable to believe her eyes.

"Dot!" she cried. "We've overslept! Do you suppose the police have called? And we've missed them?"

"Missed—who—whom—I mean?" inquired her companion, sleepily.

"The couple we're after! Sprague and that girl! Oh, Dot, wake up!"

"What shall we do?" asked Dot, realizing at last the seriousness of the situation.

"Get dressed at once!" replied Linda, as she rang the bell for the maid.

Almost miraculously the latter appeared in answer to the summons, with fresh sports-clothing for both the girls. And bringing telegrams and boxes of flowers.

"Have the police telephoned?" asked Linda, to the maid's amazement.

"Police? Oh, no, ma'am. There's been some calls for you, but not from the police. Are you expectin' them?" She eyed the girls suspi-

ciously, as if she thought they might be criminals.

"Yes," replied Linda, her fingers already on the telephone, giving the number to the operator.

"This is Linda Carlton," she announced. "Has the 'Mona' docked yet?"

"No, ma'am. But she's due any minute now, and the Chief gave me orders to call you. We've got a warrant ready for Mrs. Leslie Sprague—is that right?"

"That's it!" replied Linda, grinning with satisfaction. "And we'll be right over—so hold all the passengers until we get a look at them."

"O.K., Miss Carlton. See you later!"

Linda replaced the receiver, and turned to the maid, who was still awaiting her orders.

"Do you think we could have our breakfast right away—and then have a car take us to the flying field?" she asked. "Please ask your mistress—and tell her that it's terribly important."

"Aren't you even going to read those telegrams?" inquired Dot, a trifle disappointed. After all, it was her first big air triumph, and she wanted to enjoy the victory to its utmost.

But, instead, Linda must be rushing off immediately.

“When we come back!” returned the latter, as she put on the pretty white linen suit with which her hostess had provided her.

Dot sighed, and proceeded to dress. There was no stopping Linda, once she had made up her mind to do something.

“I could go alone, Dot,” Linda remarked, as they started for the dining-room. “Then you’d have a chance to enjoy yourself this afternoon.”

“No,” replied her chum. “It isn’t going to take long, and I wouldn’t miss it for the world. You know how I despise that man Sprague—I want to gloat over his capture.”

They ate a hasty meal that was both breakfast and lunch, and got into a car with a native chauffeur, that was waiting for them in the driveway. A few minutes later they arrived at the dock, just as the passengers from the “Mona” were about to be discharged.

It would have been difficult to press through the crowds of native children, with their flowers of welcome for the arriving visitors, had the girls not had the aid of the Chief of

Police. Clearing a passage for himself and his companions, he led them right on board the "Mona." The Captain came forward to meet them, beaming proudly at the two brave aviatrixes, as he shook their hands.

"Congratulations, Miss Carlton and Miss Crowley!" he exclaimed. "You did a valiant thing!"

"Thank you so much," replied Linda, modestly. She had no desire to talk of her flight over the Pacific; her one absorbing interest now was the capture of the girl whom she had pursued so far.

"Stand here," continued the Captain, "and you can watch the passengers as they go by."

Two by two the people on board the "Mona" walked over the gangplank to the pier, as Linda and Dot, their hearts beating fast with excitement, peered intently into their faces.

A dozen couples hurried by, then three lone passengers straggled along as if in no haste at all. But still no girl that even remotely resembled Linda. And no sign of Leslie Sprague.

"Is—that—all?" faltered Linda, unable to believe that they really had not come.

"Here's one more couple. They're still awful

seasick," explained the Captain, and Linda and Dot strained their necks to catch the first glimpse of these last people, just emerging from the cabin.

But their hopes were immediately dashed to the ground. The couple were elderly; their hair gray, their faces wrinkled.

"Maybe it's a disguise," whispered Dot, suspiciously.

The Captain shook his head.

"No. I know these people well. Cousins of mine, by the name of Rankin. Lived on Oahu all their lives."

Linda heaved a deep sigh of disappointment.

"And you're sure that's positively all the passengers who sailed from Cape San Lucas?" she asked.

"All except a couple that docked at the island of Lanai. A planter who lives there part of every year—and often makes the trip. I know him well—have brought him across half a dozen times. He had a new bride with him this trip."

"A new bride!" repeated Linda. "Did she look like me?"

The Captain regarded her closely.

“Believe she did . . . But that man’s not a criminal. He couldn’t be the fellow you want.”

“Well, whether the man is or not, the girl is!” cried Linda. “What name did they give?”

“Steve Long is the man’s name. He didn’t have to give it—I know him.”

“Light hair—light moustache?” she questioned.

“Sissy-looking?” added Dot.

The Captain smiled.

“That must be your man,” he agreed.

“So we have to fly to Lanai,” muttered Linda, turning to the Chief of Police. “Can you help me out?”

“You mean go with you?”

“No, not necessarily. I’d rather not overload the plane. . . . Isn’t there somebody on the island who would help us?”

“Of course there is. I can send a wireless to our agent over there, and you can report to him. He can give you native police, if you need them. And I’ll give you the warrant for the girl’s arrest.”

They completed their arrangements, and had the chauffeur drive them immediately to the airport, where the Sky Rocket had been resting

since their landing the preceding morning. Here they dismissed the car, asking the driver to make their explanations to his mistress, assuring her that they would be back in time for dinner. Linda then went in search of her plane.

“What sort of shape is she in?” she asked, as she spied the Sky Rocket in a hangar, with a mechanic beside her.

“Fine!” replied the man. “We did some overhauling on her yesterday—a few minor repairs, and filled her up with gas and oil. She’s fit as a fiddle now. . . . But why? You girls aren’t thinking of flying back over the ocean, are you?”

“No!” laughed Linda. “Once is enough. But we want to go to one of the islands—Lanai, to be exact—to do some scouting. We’re after a criminal.”

“A criminal?”

“Two criminals, rather. Forgers—thieves. They came across on the ‘Mona,’ and we thought they’d dock here—but they got off at Lanai instead.”

“By heck!” exclaimed the mechanic in

amazement. "What will modern girls take up next?"

"Can you tell us what that island is like?" asked Dot.

"Well, it's not like Oahu," he replied. "Not a place that tourists visit much. No hotels and stores—or cities. Mostly pineapple plantations there—not many white people, except some of the owners. . . . But I'll get you a map, and show you just where to land if you want to go to the agent's office first. He can tell you all about it."

He disappeared into an office, and returned with the map in question, marking the best spot on the beach for Linda to make her landing. Then he had the Sky Rocket pushed out on the runway, and the engine started.

"Watch the planes that arrive and leave here," Linda shouted into his ear as she climbed into the cockpit.

"I'll be on the job!" the man assured her. "And happy landings to you!"

The Sky Rocket taxied along the runway, and left the ground a minute later, as if it, too, were eager to be in the skies again, on the chase.

Over the beach of Waikiki, past Diamond Head, southeast over the Pacific Ocean again, Linda directed her course, sure that at last she was within sight of her goal.

CHAPTER XVI

MISSING!

THE girls had been away from Spring City for ten days when Mr. Carlton, Linda's father, returned from his trip abroad and arrived at his sister's home, expecting, naturally, to see his daughter.

"Hello, Emily!" he exclaimed, walking in as he so often did, without any notice, and kissing his sister nonchalantly, as if he had been absent a week instead of six months. "Where's Linda?"

"Hollywood," was his sister's reply.

"No!" exclaimed the man, in a tone of deepest disappointment. It had always been a matter of extreme satisfaction to him that Linda had never been carried away by the lure of fame and fortune, and accepted a motion-picture contract.

"Don't look so horrified, Tom!" laughed Miss Carlton. "I only wish she were safely acting

for the movies. Instead of that, she's chasing wildly around Mexico after a couple of criminals."

"Mexico!"

"Yes. And I'm so afraid of bandits there."

"Now, Emily, you're judging Mexico by the movies. That sort of stuff has gone out long ago. Mexico City is as civilized as New York."

"Mexico City—yes. But that isn't where Linda's telegram is from, and that isn't where she'll be. Trust her to find some lonely wilderness! Oh, I'm so worried. In fact, I'm packing now to go out to Los Angeles."

Her brother sat down and lighted a cigarette.

"You might as well tell me the story," he said.

Miss Carlton made it as brief as possible and showed her brother the telegrams she had received thus far. The man listened quietly, more worried than he cared to admit to his sister, but then and there he decided to go with her.

He would have preferred to fly by the commercial air-line, in order to save time, but since Miss Carlton stubbornly refused to get into a plane, he agreed to take the fast train on which she had already engaged passage.

A few hours later, just as they were about to leave the house, a very excited young man rushed into the living-room, without even waiting to ring the doorbell. It was Ralph Clavering, who always had the right to come and go as he pleased.

"I've just heard the news about Linda and Dot!" he exclaimed. "And so Jim Valier and I are flying to the coast in my autogiro immediately."

"What news?" demanded Miss Carlton, turning pale. Did he know more than she did—and had something terrible happened to her darling niece?

"About chasing off to Mexico. Dot's mother showed me the telegrams. Believe me, I'm scared this time. Those girls may be dead by now."

"Now—now—Ralph, please be a little more tactful!" urged Mr. Carlton. "Don't scare my sister to death with your gloomy conjectures."

"I'm scared to death myself," muttered the boy, sullenly. "That's why I'm going. There's nobody out there to help her—not even Ted Mackay, or that young reporter that saved her from burning to death. I've got to go!"

“Of course, that’s fine of you,” agreed Mr. Carlton. “But don’t get all worked up about it. I’m betting on Linda and Dot every time!”

“How about your college work?” questioned Miss Carlton.

“I can’t be annoyed with classes when my best girl’s in danger,” replied Ralph. “And Jim feels the same way about Dot.”

“We’re just ready to go too,” announced Miss Carlton. “But not by plane.”

Ralph smiled; he did not need to be told that.

And so that morning in early October four people departed from Spring City to go to the rescue of those two daring young fliers, who never expected help from anyone.

When the news came that Linda and Dot had safely reached Honolulu, Ralph and Jim had already arrived at the Los Angeles airport, and Miss Carlton and her brother were well on their way to the West.

Their train had stopped, at Santa Fe for a few moments, and newsboys were shouting the story.

“Two girls fly the Pacific!” they screamed. “All about the flight to Hawaii!”

Mr. Carlton looked at his sister.

“Could it be Linda and Dot?” he demanded. Miss Carlton nodded.

“Of course. They would. I knew it. The Pacific Ocean would be too much of a temptation to Linda, once she was out here. I’ve been fearing it all along.”

“But you don’t have to fear it any longer—if it really is they who did it. It’ll be over by now—and the danger past.”

He stepped to the platform and bought a paper. And, sure enough, his daughter’s and Dot’s pictures stared at him from the front page.

There was no hiding his pride now. His eyes shone with happiness; he looked like a small boy who sees his favorite pitcher win a baseball game.

“Look! Look! Emily!” he cried, as he came back to her chair. “Read what it says for yourself!” And she noticed that his hands were actually shaking.

A wave of pride and admiration surged over Miss Carlton as she read about the two dauntless girls. The first of their sex to make this flight over the gigantic ocean—from the United States to Hawaii. They had evidently made up

their minds in a hurry, and had not told anyone except the people at the airport from which they took off.

But the feat had evidently not been accepted so casually by others, for already, they read, the girls were being feted. Entertained by the Governor of Hawaii—a reception planned in their honor—and five thousand dollars apiece to be presented to them!

“And to think we came out to rescue them!” laughed Miss Carlton.

“I wonder what Ralph and Jim will think of this news,” remarked her brother.

“Ralph will probably be jealous because he didn’t make the flight with Linda—instead of Dot. But Jim will just be filled with admiration.”

“I like Jim,” observed Mr. Carlton.

“Yes, so does everybody,” agreed his sister. “He’s so good-natured, even if he is lazy. But he’s really true-blue, all the way through. And if Dot marries him, she’ll certainly keep him stepping.”

“Do you still want Linda to marry Ralph, Emily?” inquired the other. “I remember how excited you were at her graduation, be-

cause he had evidently fallen so hard for her. With all his wealth and social position.”

The woman smiled a little and shook her head.

“I’ve learned my lesson, Tom,” she said, “in this year and a half since Linda’s been out of school. I had expected her to have a year of parties—to ‘come out,’ you know—and then marry some nice young man. But Linda has plans of her own, and I realize now that I might as well save my time as to try to arrange anything for her. . . . And, as for wealth and social position—well, they simply mean nothing in her life. Besides, she doesn’t need them; I can see that. Linda could go anywhere, be accepted at Court, if she wanted to, because of what she has accomplished herself.”

“I’m glad you’ve got so much sense, Emily! Lots of women of your age wouldn’t see that at all.”

“I didn’t at first. But I do now. And so I think, when she marries, it must be somebody as big as herself. It won’t be Ralph Clavering—unless he does cave-man stuff, and actually kidnaps her.”

“Even then, she’d probably find a way to es-

cape. She always does get out of the most difficult situations.”

“Yes. When Linda marries, I think it will be love at first sight—on the spur of the moment, just as she evidently decided to take this flight to Hawaii. It will seem to her to be the one, the only thing to do—and she’ll do it. I’m sorry, for I’d love a big wedding for her—she’d make such a beautiful bride—but I’m not going to count on it.”

Mr. Carlton nodded approvingly. Like most men, he couldn’t see the use of the big fuss a formal wedding entailed. But though he knew Linda was tremendously interested in aviation, he didn’t want her to miss the happiness that marriage would bring her. His own had been blissfully happy during its short duration, until his wife died at her baby daughter’s birth.

“Yes, Linda will decide for herself,” he muttered. “I only hope that the man will be worthy of her.”

“He couldn’t be. No mere man could possibly equal Linda,” remarked Miss Carlton.

“How you love to tease, Emily!” retorted her brother. “But I guess you’re right at that.”

The rest of the journey seemed longer than ever, now, to the impatient couple who longed to be with the girls to celebrate their great triumph with them. Never did a train seem to move so slowly. But at last it arrived at Los Angeles, about seven o'clock of the night on which Linda and Dot came down in the wilds of Oahu, at the cabin of their enemies.

"We'll take a boat to Honolulu tomorrow," announced Miss Carlton. "I only wish we could take it right away—if there were only one sailing."

From out of the crowd on the platform two young men, hatless and sun-burned, edged their way toward the Carltons. Both were tall, so that they could easily be seen above the heads of the other people around.

"Greetings, Miss Carlton!" called Ralph Clavering, before he had even reached them. "We've got bad news."

"Bad news!" repeated Mr. Carlton, in consternation. "But we read in the papers that the girls arrived safely in Honolulu!"

"Yes. They did, sir. But they're lost again!"

Miss Carlton seized Ralph's arm, to steady herself, and looked into his face.

“You’re not joking, Ralph? You wouldn’t—joke about a think like this?” Her voice was trembling.

“Indeed I’m not, Miss Carlton,” replied the boy, earnestly. “I’m worried sick.”

Mr. Carlton, however, looked less troubled than his sister.

“No, I know you’re not joking, Ralph,” he said. “But you probably are exaggerating. You always see the black side of everything. You and my sister are just alike. . . . But let’s go over here and sit down, and suppose Jim tells us the story.”

They went to one of the waiting-rooms in the station and sat down together, Miss Carlton struggling hard to get herself under control. Suppose Linda had taken it into her head to fly back—and she and Dot were now lost at the bottom of the Pacific! Suppose—But Jim was already explaining.

“Well, we don’t know much that you haven’t read in the papers,” he began. “The girls went to the dinner and the reception in their honor last night, and were staying at the Governor’s mansion. We were going to sail for the island this morning, but there was no boat till

tomorrow, so we called them on the telephone.

"That was about eleven o'clock this morning, and we were told that they were still asleep. We phoned again at one, and they had gone out.

"So we sent a couple of telegrams and waited. We asked them to call our hotel here at Los Angeles. But by seven o'clock there was no message, and we sort of got mad. At least, Ralph did. I thought maybe they had too much to do, but Ralph thought some new bird like that Englishman Linda fell for last summer was taking her time, and he resented it.

"But I persuaded him to give them another chance, and we phoned again. This time the Governor himself talked to me. And he was really scared.

"It seems Linda and Dot had gone to the airport right after they got up about noon, and had taken the Sky Rocket for a flight—"

"The Sky Rocket?" interrupted Mr. Carlton. "Has Linda a new plane?"

"Temporarily—yes. The Ladybug is here at Los Angeles. . . . But that's another story. . . . Well, anyhow, the girls promised to be back early, for a dinner that had been planned in their honor but they haven't been heard from!"

“Murdered! Attacked by some half-breeds, of course!” cried Miss Carlton. “And no man with them to protect them!”

“Nonsense, Emily!” returned her brother. “They probably ran out of gas—or damaged a wing. Or had a missing spark-plug. Linda will fix that, and those two girls will show up tomorrow morning.”

“I wish I could think that, sir,” said Ralph. “Gosh, if I only had my bug over there on that island! But I haven’t the nerve to fly it.”

“No, don’t!” pleaded Miss Carlton. “It would only add another disaster to our troubles. No, we’ll sail together tomorrow morning.”

“In the meanwhile, let’s go to our hotel and wash and have dinner,” suggested Mr. Carlton. “Then things may look brighter. I positively refuse to worry till I have just cause!”

“Wise man!” commented Jim Valier, as he picked up Miss Carlton’s bag.

So the little group had dinner together at the Ambassador, waiting all the time tensely for news. But none came. And the newspapers duly reported the story that the dinner for two famous aviatrixes had been postponed!

CHAPTER XVII

CAPTURE

THE flight across the Pacific from Oahu to Lanai took less than two hours. Early in the afternoon Linda brought the Sky Rocket to a landing on the beach of the lonely island, near to the spot indicated on her map.

“That must be the agent’s shack over there,” she said, as she and Dot climbed out of the cockpit. “I hope he’s there.”

The girls walked along the beach a short distance. How different it was from Waikiki! How deserted! Yet just as beautiful in the bright sunlight. Before they reached the shack, however, a man in a linen suit came out to meet them.

“Miss Carlton and Miss Crowley, I suppose?” he inquired, holding out his hand. He was a pleasant-faced man of middle age, with a tanned complexion and eyes as blue as the

waters of the Pacific. "My name is Jardin. I have the wireless from Honolulu."

"Then you know all about us," said Linda. "Can you take us to Steven Long's plantation?"

"Yes, I can. But it doesn't seem possible that that man is a criminal. What are the charges against him?"

Briefly, Linda told the facts of her story.

"But those are all charges against the girl," Jardin pointed out. "You haven't anything against Long."

"He stole two planes," insisted Dot.

"You mean his wife stole them. I don't think that man can fly."

Linda and Dot looked at each other in disappointment. How awful it would be if they couldn't bring Sprague to justice! For they believed that he was responsible for the whole affair.

"Well, we've got plenty against the girl—if she is the one you're seeking," concluded Jardin. "So I'll get my runabout and drive you over to their plantation."

"Wait!" interposed Dot. "A plane's coming! Who can it be?"

"Probably only some of the coast guards," explained Jardin, gazing up at the approaching monoplane. It was the type used by the U. S. fliers in their patrol about the islands.

Nearer and nearer it whirred; a moment later it swooped down on the beach a short distance from them. The pilot climbed out of the cockpit, and the girls, recognizing him instantly, uttered a wild cry of joy. It was Bertram Chase!

"Bert!" they both cried at the same time, as he rushed forward and seized their hands. "What miracle brought you here?"

"I found out about your flight at the Honolulu airport," he replied. "You might know I'd come after you, no matter where you went!"

"But what are you doing in Hawaii?" demanded Dot.

"I sailed from Los Angeles the very night I left you—after I put the Ladybug into the airport. We're on the track of a counterfeiter, and a clue pointed to Honolulu. Money turned in at a bank there. So I was sent to Hawaii. Lucky break for me!" He looked admiringly at Linda.

"That's great!" exclaimed Dot. "Leave

your plane here and come along with us in Mr. Jardin's car. We think we're going to nab Linda's double at last."

Mr. Jardin took the wheel of his runabout and Linda sat beside him. In the rumble-seat behind, Dot and Bert Chase laughed and talked excitedly of the adventure.

Over the beach, through lanes that could hardly be called roads, the little car threaded its way into the heart of the island. Fifteen minutes later, within sight of a low, straw-covered bungalow, it came to a stop.

"This is Long's place," announced Jardin. "Do you all want to come in with me?"

"Certainly," replied Dot, her eyes sparkling with anticipation.

Along a path overgrown with ferns and flowers, in thick profusion, the little party went single file to the veranda of the bungalow. Not a person was in sight; the place looked empty. Had Sprague and his wife run away again—or were they only hiding?

Jardin stepped boldly up to the door and rapped. A native boy answered his summons in a minute or two.

“Meester Jardin,” he said, with a grin of welcome.

“Is your master about?” asked the agent.

The boy nodded and beckoned for them to come inside.

The room to which the door opened was deserted. A plain, bare room, with only a few rough chairs, a table, and a hard cot. Not exactly the kind of place a woman would enjoy.

“I get him,” said the boy, indicating for the visitors to be seated, and going out of the front door again.

Linda and Dot sat down upon the hard chairs, but Chase wandered aimlessly around the room, examining its scanty contents with curiosity. Another native boy came in with a pitcher of water, and Jardin inquired for Mrs. Long.

“She sick,” he explained, briefly, pointing to another room beyond, and he, too, disappeared.

They drank their water, and waited tensely. Why didn't the man come? Did he suspect something? Chase continued to walk about the room, peering with interest at the closed door where the girl was supposed to be lying, stopping now at the table beside a window, and

picking up a little tool that looked like a nut-pick, that was lodged in a crack between the table and the window-sill.

“What’s that, Bert?” asked Dot idly, not because she cared about knowing, but just for something to say.

“Looks like a dentist’s drill to me,” remarked Jardin, with a shudder.

But Chase was holding it up, examining it closely, his eyes staring with unbelief. He had made a discovery!

“I’m going to investigate this place!” he announced, putting the little instrument into his pocket. “See you later.” And he went out of the front door.

“Now what do you suppose—?” began Dot, but she stopped abruptly, for at that moment a door at the back opened and Long came into the room. He, like Jardin, was wearing a linen suit, and a big hat, but there was no mistaking the man. As Linda and Dot had insisted, he was none other than Leslie Sprague!

If he was startled by the sight of the two aviatrices, he did not betray the fact by his expression. Whatever he felt, he covered his surprise by a grin.

"Afternoon, Jardin," he said, calmly shaking hands. "How are you?"

"Afternoon, Long," replied the agent, looking questioningly at the girls.

"How do you do, Mr. Leslie Sprague?" asked Dot, triumphantly.

Sprague shrugged his shoulders and laughed.

"A name I used in connection with moving-pictures," he explained to Jardin.

"Where is your wife, Long?" asked the agent, desirous of getting this business over as quickly as possible. "If she is the girl these young ladies believe her to be, we have a warrant for her arrest."

"Poor Fanny's sick," replied Sprague. "Too bad to arrest her now, when she feels so rotten. . . . Besides, it was only a prank." He looked understandingly at Jardin.

"A prank!" repeated Dot, in disdain. "A prank to steal two planes, chloroform both of us, and forge a check for five thousand dollars!"

Sprague laughed uncomfortably.

"You must be mistaken, Miss—er--Manton." He remembered Dot's assumed name,

and took pleasure in using it. "Probably Mexican bandits did that."

"Mexican bandits can't fly planes!" returned Dot, defiantly.

"We will have to take your wife, Long," interrupted Jardin. "Go in and get her."

"Can't we arrest him?" demanded Dot, resentfully.

"I don't see how we can, until we have something more definite," replied Jardin, who was evidently an easy-going person, who hated to suspect anybody. "We can hold him as accessory while his wife is being tried. . . ."

He stopped abruptly, for Chase suddenly opened the door and walked into the room, dragging a man with him. A hard-looking fellow, with a sullen expression and a slinking gait.

"I have found my counterfeiter!" Chase announced triumphantly to Jardin. "And this is his accomplice!"

Still holding the man by the arm, the detective swung about and pointed his finger at Sprague.

"Steven Long is the criminal the U. S. Government has been searching for for a year!

Long, alias Logman, alias Sprague—" He stopped, and laughed. "To think that I saw this man in the studio of the Apex Film Corporation—even tried to help him out—and never knew who he was! The joke is on me!"

"But you've got him now!" cried Dot, unable to restrain her delight.

All eyes were turned upon Sprague. He was not laughing now. Rather, he was cowering, deathly pale, holding on to a chair for support. He did not even demand how Chase had discovered his secret. But Jardin asked immediately.

"It was this little instrument I picked up out of the crack," explained the young detective, producing the tool that resembled a nut-pick. "I recognized it as an engraver's tool. I wondered why it should be here. And then I had an inspiration to search the place. Where could a counterfeiter work better than here on this lonely island? Under the guise of a pineapple planter?"

"But is that all the proof you have, Chase?" demanded Jardin, impatiently.

"Not by any means. That was only the beginning. I wandered about the place till I

found another shack, hidden almost completely by camouflage. But I got in. And caught this fellow—" he shook his captive's arm—"in the act of engraving fifty-dollar bills!"

Deliberately, then, he reached into his pocket for two pairs of handcuffs, which he calmly proceeded to fasten upon the wrists of the two men. A tense silence lasted while he performed this operation, a silence which was suddenly broken by the hysterical wail of a girl.

In a second the closed door of the bedroom was flung open, and Linda's double dashed into the room. Sobbing with fright, she threw herself at Linda's feet.

"I didn't know I was married to a criminal!" she wailed. "Oh, this is the end—the end of everything! I wish I was dead!"

Leaning over, Linda gently raised the girl to her feet, and for the first time, looked into the face of her double. The same blue eyes, and blond, curly hair; a nose not unlike her own, and a lovely, flower-like complexion. But oh, how different she looked, with that expression of terror and misery on her face, and the tears streaming from her eyes! Like Linda, and yet totally unlike her!

“Sit down, — Fanny,” whispered Linda.
“And try to control yourself.”

The girl did as she was told, and Chase turned to Jardin.

“Let’s take these men away in your car, Jardin,” he suggested. “And come back for the girls. We’ll send a wireless for a boat to come over from Honolulu and put them into the jail there.”

“Is that all right with you, Miss Carlton?” inquired Jardin. “Can you manage Fanny till we get back?”

“Yes, that suits me,” agreed Linda.

“Do you want to say good-bye to your husband, Mrs. Long?” asked Chase.

“I never want to see him again!” was the impassioned reply. “I hate him!”

So the four men went out, leaving Linda and Dot alone at last with the girl who had made so much trouble for them. The girl who had pretended to be Linda Carlton!

CHAPTER XVIII

FANNY'S STORY

THE three girls sat silently for a few minutes after the men had left. They heard the car start, and Fanny heaved a sigh of relief.

“Of course you hate me,” she said, in a pathetic voice, turning her face towards Linda. “But I don’t believe you can hate me half so much as I hate Les!”

Both Linda and Dot looked at the girl in surprise.

“But you didn’t have to marry him!” Dot pointed out.

“I know. But I hadn’t found him out then. I—I didn’t know anybody could be so awful!”

Linda stood up.

“Suppose,” she suggested, “we go outside where it is so much more beautiful—and hear your story, Fanny. I’d like to know just what did lead up to your pretending to be me.”

The girl jumped to her feet. She didn’t seem

sick at all now; in all probability it had only been nerves.

“Wait,” she said. “I want to get you something first.” And she disappeared into the bedroom.

In a moment she returned, carrying a heavy bag in her hands.

“It’s your money, Linda,” she said. “That check I cashed. Les made me get it in gold—I guess he didn’t want the bank numbers traced. Anyhow, I hid it, and never let him have it.”

And she dropped the bag at Linda’s feet.

“Why, thank you, Fanny,” said Linda, in surprise. “I’ll just leave it here till Mr. Chase comes back for us.”

“Aren’t you going to count it?”

“Oh, no. I believe you,” replied Linda.

Tears came into Fanny’s eyes. She seized Linda’s hand gratefully.

“It’s sweet of you to say that,” she said. “But you better not leave it here just the same. You can’t trust those native boys.”

“True,” admitted Dot, and picking it up, she carried it for Linda out of the bungalow.

The girls walked along the path and settled themselves on the ground amongst the bright

flowers and soft ferns. Now that Fanny had stopped crying, it was astonishing how much she resembled Linda. Both Linda and Dot watched her intently, eager to hear her version of the story.

“Well,” she began, finally, “I’ll tell you first of all that I’m an orphan. I was brought up in a children’s home—I don’t remember my parents at all. But I had a pretty good education, and took a business course after I finished high school. My first job was with an airplane construction company.”

“You mean you had a flying job?” interrupted Linda, with interest.

“No. I was a stenographer. But the boss did give me a chance to learn to fly—on the side. But there wasn’t any hope of a job in aviation—I just worked inside the office for twenty-five dollars a week. And, like every other girl in the world, I never had enough money.”

“Where did you work?” asked Dot. “What city, I mean?”

“San Francisco. That was the trouble, I suppose. Too near Hollywood. I got the craze to go into pictures. Everybody told me I was

pretty—and other girls succeeded—so why shouldn't I?"

"Naturally," commented Dot.

"Well, I had some money saved up," continued Fanny, "and I tried to register at all the studios as an extra. But I soon learned how impossible it is to get into the movies in times like these. I couldn't land a thing—not even a part in a crowd!"

"I've heard they're using old actresses and actors for those parts—people who used to be stars—and even ex-directors," remarked Linda.

"It's true! And even some of those people can't get anything at all! People with years of experience go absolutely broke! . . . Well, my money dwindled and dwindled until I finally met Mr. Sprague. Not in a studio—but at a party. That was last June—only a little while after you made your famous Atlantic Ocean flight."

Linda nodded, wondering whose idea the masquerade had been. She asked the question.

"It was Mr. Sprague's," replied Fanny. "He saw the resemblance immediately to your newspaper pictures, and when he found out I

could fly a plane, he told me I ought to cash in on it. I thought he was only joking, but he told me he was serious, and explained how you had refused movie contracts at enormous salaries. . . . Well, he kept after me, and when I found that I wasn't getting any parts, and that my money was all gone and even my old job in San Francisco, I gave in and promised to try it.

"Les planned everything—even rehearsed with me how I was to talk to Mr. Von Goss. And it was he who pushed through the aviation picture.

"Mr. Von Goss was lovely—he never asked me for any proofs of my identity at all, just signed me up for the picture, and it was Les who made me insist on the enormous salary. I acted stubborn, like Greta Garbo, and I got it.

"And then Les proposed to me. Told me that he'd invest my money, and give up his job at the studio and come over here to Hawaii to live after we were married. He said he had a plantation here, and that I'd never be discovered as the girl who pretended to be Linda Carlton. Oh, Les can be very charming if he tries, and he made me think we'd live on this island paradise in a perpetual honeymoon."

“Then you had no idea that he was also involved in anything that was crooked?” asked Linda.

“No. Absolutely none. I just thought that the masquerade was a clever trick, that wouldn't really hurt anybody, because you had refused movie contracts. . . . Well, to get back to the story. . . . Everything went well till you girls appeared. Of course we were prepared for that—Les had thought it all out ahead of time, in case you ever did show up. I came back to Los Angeles, as you know, in a hired plane, and was just about to land when Les gave me the pre-arranged signal not to come down. You remember—waving his hat on the field?”

Linda nodded, though she had hardly noticed it at the time.

“I flew off and landed an hour later at Culver City. And he pushed the rehearsals right through, and the next morning he told me to go right to the Los Angeles airport and demand your autogiro. We'd only borrow it, he said, to get away. I believed him, and did it, for I was anxious to be married and out of the coun-

try. We flew to Mexico, as you know, and got married.

“And I guess you know the rest. How we circled about you when we found out you were chasing us—and how we changed planes. But you don’t know that Les made me fly that Sky Rocket at the point of a pistol. He seemed to change then and there into a demon, and he had me frightened to death. Of course I realized what a horrible mistake it had been to marry him.

“Then he seemed nice again when we sailed on that boat, but when I actually saw you girls fly over the Pacific Ocean, it was too much for me. We recognized the Sky Rocket, and knew you were after us. I wanted to give up then, but Les said nobody would ever find us here at Lanai. . . .”

“But didn’t you know that he was a counterfeiter, after you lived here?”

“No, of course not. I never knew till this afternoon. Of course I’d often seen that man before—the one that the detective caught—but I thought he was just the overseer. Les has always been away from here most of the time,

so he needed somebody to manage the plantation."

"Is there much of a plantation?" asked Linda, suspiciously.

"I guess not," admitted Fanny. "We do raise a few pineapples. But I never saw any great quantities. And there are only a couple of native boys working here."

"Well, you won't have to worry about your marriage, anyhow. So long as Sprague married you under a false name, and in Mexico besides, I guess it can easily be annulled. You won't have to see him again."

Fanny was silent, worn out with the tension of telling her story. Stretching back, she buried her face in the ferns. Linda and Dot looked at each other in hopeless dismay. Here was the girl whom Linda had threatened to prosecute to the uttermost, completely in her power, and she felt only sympathy for her!

"You poor kid!" said Dot, feelingly, as if Fanny were years younger than she was.

"Oh, I know it's my own fault," said Fanny, with a suppressed sob. "It was acting a lie in the beginning. But I never dreamed it would lead to anything like this. I thought if you—

the real Linda Carlton—ever did appear, I'd just hand over the money, and maybe you'd give me back part of it for my work in the picture."

"I suppose," said Linda, "that we have to learn for ourselves that deceit never pays. But somehow, I can't be hard on you, Fanny. And I'll tell you why. It's because of the very first thing you told us—that you are an orphan. It's so much more difficult if you haven't parents to teach you. I—haven't a mother—but I have a wonderful father and a loving aunt. . . . So, somehow, I just feel as if I hadn't the right to judge you. . . ."

Without raising her head from the ground, Fanny groped blindly for Linda's hand. And found it and pressed it gratefully.

The sound of a motor in the distance made the girls glance towards the lane. The car was returning.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked Fanny, plaintively.

"Take you with us, of course," replied Linda. "You can fly with Mr. Chase."

"And—when we get to Honolulu—shall I have to go to jail?"

Linda hesitated a moment and looked at Dot. But her companion, usually so relentless in seeing that justice was done, had evidently softened too. She, also, felt a great sympathy for Fanny.

“I don’t think so,” said Linda. “I think you’ve suffered enough, Fanny. You’ve returned my money, and both planes, and if you’ll return Mr. Von Goss’s—”

“I can’t!” interrupted the girl. “Les took that.”

“Well, he’ll be made to return it. So—if you’ll promise to be good, I think we’ll let you go free—if Mr. Chase can fix it up with the police.”

The girl’s blue eyes opened wide with appreciation.

“You really mean that, Linda?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Oh, you are wonderful! So generous! So clever, too!” She lowered her eyelids. “And to think I ever dared to pretend I could be you!”

Linda flushed in embarrassment at this praise—from the girl she had been regarding as her worst enemy. Luckily she did not need

to say anything, for the car had stopped now, and Jardin, who had returned alone, was getting out.

“I left Chase with the two prisoners,” he explained. “Now you girls climb in.”

“Oughtn’t we to say something to the native boys who work here?” asked Fanny.

“I’ll come back and talk to them later,” replied Jardin. “After Long tells me what he wants to do with the plantation.”

The ride back to the beach consumed only fifteen minutes, but Linda realized when she got there that the afternoon was gone. So much time had been spent at the plantation, waiting around, first for Sprague, and then for the return of Jardin. Though it was still bright sunlight, her watch indicated six o’clock.

“We had better send a wireless to our hostess,” she said to Dot. “To let her know that we can’t be back in time for dinner.”

Her chum nodded dismally. Another festivity passed up! But it had been worth while this time, for at last their purpose was accomplished.

Linda proceeded to send the wireless from the

Sky Rocket, and then returned to the agent's shack, where Chase was still sitting.

"Will you take Fanny," she asked, "and when you get to Honolulu see whether you can have that warrant for her arrest nullified? We are dropping the charges."

The young detective stared at Linda in incredulous amazement.

"You don't really mean it?" he gasped.

Linda laughed.

"I do, though. Fanny returned the money—and is sorry, so we're forgiving her. That's all there is to it."

"You stand there and tell me you're letting that girl off, after flying four thousand miles, over land and ocean, to capture her?" he demanded.

Linda nodded.

"But why?"

"Because Linda's a Christian!" retorted Dot, exasperated at the delay. "But I warn you, Bert, I won't show Christian spirit towards you, if you don't stop talking and get a move on pretty soon. Do you realize we're starved—and we've got almost two hours' flight before we get any food?"

Chase grinned, and started towards the door.

“If you’re willing to wait an hour,” suggested Jardin, “I can take you all to my bungalow for supper.”

“No, thank you, Mr. Jardin,” replied Linda. “We want to be on our way—and fly while it is light. We’ll set off immediately. Fanny, you go with Mr. Chase. Come on, everybody!”

“What’s your other name, Fanny?” asked Chase, as the group walked along the beach to the planes.

“Preston,” replied the girl, with a sigh of relief at the thought of dropping the name of Sprague—or Long—forever.

The Sky Rocket took off first, and five minutes later Chase’s monoplane left the island. Within sight of each other, the two planes flew across the Pacific in the glorious light of the sunset, and arrived at the Honolulu airport without any disaster, a little after eight o’clock.

CHAPTER XIX

CONCLUSION

LEAVING the planes at the airport, the four young people ate supper together at a quick-lunch restaurant in Honolulu. Here they discussed their plans concerning Fanny Preston.

Linda insisted that the girl live at one of the smaller hotels, on some of the gold pieces which she had returned that afternoon, and though Fanny protested, she had no money of her own, and no place to go, so she finally had to agree. In the meantime, Chase promised to work for her release.

“And then we’ll take you back to Los Angeles with us when we go,” Linda concluded. “And try to find you a job.”

There were tears in Fanny’s eyes when Linda and Dot finally left her at the hotel and took a taxi to the Governor’s mansion. Here they offered profuse apologies to their hostess—apologies which she dismissed with a smile.

She was delighted to learn that the counterfeiting menace had been checked, for news of this crime had been in the papers for more than a year. She felt that Linda and Dot had helped in a big service for both Hawaii and the United States, but the girls insisted that the honors were for Bertram Chase.

“Now for our telegrams!” exclaimed Linda. “Oh, I do so hope there is one from father!”

“I received one from your father, Miss Carlton,” announced her hostess. “From Los Angeles. He and your aunt are sailing tomorrow for Honolulu. And two young men are with them—I have forgotten their names.”

“Was one of them Jim—I mean James—Valier?” asked Dot, eagerly.

The older woman smiled.

“I believe so,” she said. “And a Ralph somebody. Would that be right?”

“Absolutely,” agreed Dot, with immense satisfaction.

“So, in view of that news,” continued the Governor’s wife, “I think we will plan a big dinner for the night they arrive. It takes four days, you know, from Los Angeles. I hope we can keep you amused until then.”

“Oh, we love it here!” cried Linda. “It’s the most beautiful spot in the world!”

So, although Linda was anxious to see her own family and the two boys, the time nevertheless passed pleasantly. They went to the famous Waikiki beach every morning, and swam in the water that seemed like velvet, or rode in the launches and speed boats. After luncheon they drove about the beautiful island visiting the marvellous aquarium, with its gorgeous fish of all colors and descriptions, or viewing the mountains and the coral formations; and in the evening they would watch the glorious sunsets over the ocean and then dance or bathe in the moonlight. One lovely afternoon Linda and Dot took Fanny and flew to the island of Kauai, and saw the Waimea Canyon and the Barking Sands, and the rocky, jagged cliffs, and the beaches and parks in all their beauty. And one evening Bert Chase went with them on another flight, for he had managed to have his stay at Hawaii extended, since he had successfully completed his work.

And so the great day came when the boat from Los Angeles docked at Pearl Harbor. Linda and Dot were at the wharf half an hour

before it was scheduled to arrive, so impatient were they to see their folks from home.

A great surging joy swelled up in Linda's throat at the sight of her father as he came forward to meet her. It was so suffocating that for a moment she couldn't say a word of greeting. Breathless, she flew into his arms.

"Daughter!" he said, in a tone filled with emotion.

"Daddy, darling!" she managed to stammer, and then, recovering herself somewhat, she kissed her aunt and shook hands with the boys.

"Congratulations, congratulations, and then some!" exclaimed Jim, to both of the girls.

"It was great, Linda!" cried Ralph.

"'Linda and Dot,' if you please," corrected Linda. "Dot did every bit as much as I did!"

"In fact, I flew nearer the ocean," added her chum, mischievously. "So near that I almost drowned us both!"

"Don't tell us about the dangers—now that you have miraculously escaped with your lives!" begged Miss Carlton, with a shiver.

And then everybody talked at once, asking questions, making explanations, accounting for all the time since they had seen each other.

The girls drove right to the hotel with the party, and here Linda dragged out Fanny and introduced her, much to Miss Carlton's amazement. And then she actually asked her aunt to look after the girl for the rest of the visit, until they should all go back to Los Angeles together.

The dinner at the Governor's mansion that night was another gorgeous affair. All the celebrities of the island were invited, as well as Linda's friends. Even Fanny Preston was included, and Bertram Chase was accorded a seat of honor on Linda's right, with Ralph Clavering on her left—an arrangement which made Ralph exceedingly jealous, for Chase managed to absorb most of her attention.

"I want you to go into the secret service, Linda," he said, earnestly. "You'd be a marvellous detective. Have you signed up for anything for the winter?"

"I had expected to teach," replied the aviatrix. "But I guess it's too late for that."

"No, no, don't do that."

Chase wasn't eating at all, instead he was fumbling with his fork, as if he were terribly nervous. Linda noticed his queer actions, and wondered what could be the cause of them, for

he had always seemed to have such easy, pleasant manners. But his next question, abrupt as it was, offered the explanation.

“It’s a funny place—and a funny time—to ask you, Linda,” he began, very low, “but I’m so afraid you’ll fly away and I’ll never see you again. . . . You see—I’m crazy about you. I love you! I want you to marry me, and fly everywhere with me!”

Faltering as his speech was at first, he ended it very fast, as if he had to finish with one breath. Out of the corner of her eye, Linda could see his hand trembling; this fearless flier, who dared all sorts of dangers! Why, he seemed to be afraid to look in her face!

Linda, too, was embarrassed; she didn’t know what to say. She liked him so much that she couldn’t bear to hurt his feelings, yet marriage was out of the question at this time.

“I appreciate it a lot, Bert,” she finally replied, softly. “But—I couldn’t. Not now, anyway,” she added, so as not to seem too abrupt. “But there’s no reason why you shouldn’t see me often. Distance isn’t anything to fliers. And I’ll talk to you later about the secret service.” She paused, nodding in Ralph’s di-

rection. . . . "This impatient boy on my left is having a fit. I must talk to him now."

She turned to the latter, sulking as usual.

"Old friends are a nuisance when we have a new crush, aren't they?" he asked, bitterly.

"Ralph, behave yourself!" she commanded. "Don't spoil my party by getting peeved!"

"I'm sorry, Linda," he said, penitently. "I didn't mean it. Only I just know that guy has fallen for you. What was he talking to you so long about?"

Linda blushed. "He wants me to go into secret service flying," she explained.

"He would! And then get you to marry him!"

Linda laughed, as if to imply that what Ralph suggested was nonsense. If he only knew how near to the point he had come!

"Well, are you going to do it!" he persisted.

"I don't know. First I'm going to get my Ladybug at Los Angeles—and fly home!"

"Ladybug, Ladybug, fly away home!" quoth Ralph.

"We will!" promised Linda, smiling. But she did not say how long she would stay there.

THE END.